

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

(CONGREVE)

Edited with Introduction and Notes

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Introduction :</i>	<i>i-xlvii</i>
1. William Congreve	.. i
2. The Comedies of Congreve	.. ii
3. Congreve's Art	.. v
4. Congreve's Style	.. vii
5. Types of Comedy	.. xi
6. Rise of the Comedy of Manners	.. xiii
7. Comedy of Manners	.. xiv
8. Morality in the Comedy of Manners	.. xvi
9. The Elizabethan Comedy and the Comedy of Manners ..	xix
10. The Meaning of the term 'Manners'	.. xxiii
11. The Comedy of Manners and the Comedy of Humours ..	xxiv
12. The Title of the Play	.. xxvi
13. Construction of Plot in <i>The Way of the World</i>	xxviii
14. Defects in the Plot	.. xxx
15. Sources of the Comic in <i>The Way of the World</i>	xxxi

	<i>Page</i>
16. <u>Wit in <i>The Way of the World</i></u>	.. xxxiv
17. Characterisation in <i>The Way of the World</i>	.. xxxvii
18. Characters of the Play	.. xxxix
<i>Text</i>	.. 1-124
<i>Notes</i>	.. 122-171
<i>Extracts from eminent critics</i>	.. 175-186
<i>Questions</i>	.. 187
<i>Bibliography</i>	.. 188

Introduction

1. William Congreve (1670—1729) :

William Congreve was born in 1670 at Bardsey, near Leeds of an ancient family. His father, a soldier, became a land agent in Ireland, and Congreve was educated first at the grammar school, Kilkenny, and then at Trinity College, Dublin at both which he was a fellow-student of Swift. He then passed to the Middle Temple in London, but soon gave up law for literature. He published a feeble prose-tale, *Incognita* (1692) and in 1683, submitted his first play, *The Old Bachelor* to Dryden who praised it highly, put it perhaps as a little into stage-shape and got it acted in 1693. Of his other comedies *The Double Dealer* appeared in 1694, *Love for Love* in 1695, and *The Way of the World* in 1700. His one tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, was produced in 1697. In 1698, Jeremy Collier attacked Congreve in his 'Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.' Though Congreve replied to the attack made on him, he gave up writing for the stage, especially because of the comparative failure of his last comedy (*The Way of the World*). He received valuable Government places, wrote a masque or two, and some lyrics in the artificial style. He enjoyed the admiration of the people, and the friendship of men like Swift, Steele and Pope. He died in 1729 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

2. The Comedies of Congreve :

He wrote in all four comedies. First came *The Old Bachelor* (1693). It showed a precocious knowledge of the

ways of the world and was exceedingly successful on the stage.

The Old Bachelor (1693)

The 'Old Bachelor' is Heartwell, 'a surly old pretended woman-hater,' who falls in love with Silvia, and is cheated into marrying her. Silvia is in fact the forsaken mistress of Vainlove, and Heartwell subsequently discovers her true character from the jokes and gibes of his acquaintances. But his marriage with Silvia is a pretence, for the person who has married them, is not a real person, but Vainlove's friend, Belmour, who assumed the disguise for the purpose of an intrigue with Lactitia, the young wife of an old banker. Heartwell is relieved to hear that the marriage is a pretence. The comedy includes the amusing characters of Sir James Wittol, a foolish knight, who allows himself to be really married to Silvia, under the impression that she is the wealthy Araminta. The success of the play was partly due to the acting of Betterton and Mrs. Bracegirdle.

The Double Dealer (1694) :

The *Double Dealer* shows a marked improvement on the previous play, thought it is more of a tragic-comedy than a comedy, and "might, indeed, with very slight alteration of incident and hardly any language have come to the sanguinary end which it very nearly reaches in fact." Lady Touchood, a violent dissolute woman, is in love with Mellefont, the nephew of her husband, but as he rejects her advances, determines to prevent her marriage with Cynthia, daughter of Sir Paul Plyant. In this design, she secures the assistance of Maskwell, the Double Dealer, who has been her lover. Maskwell pretends to be Mellefont's friend, and tries to cheat

him of Cynthia and get her for himself. He deceives all around but his treachery is discovered in time. Mellefont is married to Cynthia and Lady Touchwood cast out of her husband's house. The characters of Lady Touchwood and of Maskwell have a touch not merely of villainy but of sambre sullenness about them, which seems to be out of place in a comedy.

Love for Love (1695) :

The shadow of tragedy entirely disappears from *Love for Love*, which is all pure comedy, although, says Saintsbury, 'there is little real mirth behind some of the merriment. According to Gosse, *Love for Love* is 'the masterpiece' of Congreve, and the most brilliant pure comedy of manners in the English language'. Sir Sampson Legend is displeased at the extravagance of his son Valentine, and offers him £ 4000 (only enough to pay his debts) if he will sign a bond engaging to make over his right of inheritance to his younger brother Ben, who is at sea. Valentine, to escape his creditors, signs the bond. He is in love with Angelica, who has a fortune of her own, but she has not yet accepted his suit. Sir Sampson has arranged a match between Ben and Miss Prue, an awkward country girl, the daughter of Foresight, a superstitious old fool, who claims to be an astrologer. Valentine pretends to be mad and unable to sign the final deed of conveyance to his brother. In the end, Angelica intervenes. She pretends to love Sir Sampson, who proposes marriage to her. She makes him believe that she will marry him, and then gets possession of Valentine's bond. When Valentine is filled with despair at finding that Angelica is going to marry his father, Angelica reveals the plot, tears up the bond and declares her love for Valentine. "The comedy is enlivened by its witty dialogue and its humorous characters. The Principal personages of the

play are drawn with a masterly hand—Valentine, the scholar-lover ; Sir Sampson with his blunt vivacity ; Tattle, the type, of fatuous vanity ; Ben, the rough young sea-dog ; the frivolous and joyous sisters, Frail and Foresight ; and the dignified and passionate Angelica. “All these are”, says Saintsbury, “for purely theatrical flesh and blood, perfect triumphs in their kind and they move, throughout in a perfect star-shower of verbal fireworks.”

The Way of the World (1700) :

Yet Congreve had not exhausted himself. His last play, *The Way of the World*, though better-knit than *Love for Love*, failed to please the public. It was more wit, but less action than Congreve's other comedies, and contains in Millamant, the coquettish heroine, the queen of all her kind. Mirabell is in love with Millamant, niece of Lady Wishfort ; but in order to conceal his suit of the niece, he has pretended to make love to the aunt. This deceit has been revealed to Lady Wishfort by Mrs. Marwood, who seeks to take revenge on Mirabell, who has rejected her advances. Lady Wishfort therefore hates Mirabell, and determines to deprive Millamant or half her fortune (which is in her keeping) if she marries Mirabell. He now makes a plan to win Lady Wishfort's consent to his marriage with her niece. He contrives that his servant Waitwell will personate his uncle Sir Rowland and will pretend to make love to Lady Wishfort. The plot is discovered by Mrs. Marwood, who also comes to know that Mirabell has in the past been a lover of Mrs. Fainall, the daughter of Lady Wishfort. Now Mrs. Marwood conspires with Fainall, her lover, to reveal these facts to Lady Wishfort, while Fainall is to threaten to divorce his wife, unless he is given full control of Mrs. Fainall's property and ,unless Millamant's portion is

also given over to him. But the scheme fails. Mrs. Fainall not only denies the charge against her, but produces evidence of Mrs. Marwood's relations with Fainall. Moreover, Mirabell produces a deed by which Mrs. Fainall, before her marriage, had made him trustee of her property. Lady Wishfort feels grateful to Mirabell for releasing her from the threats of Fainall, and forgives Mirabell, and gives her consent to his marriage with Millamant.

"Besides the finished portrait of Millamant, finely tempered in sense and intellect, Congreve's most brilliant creation, there are amusing characters in Sir Wilful Witwoud, Lady Wishfort's boisterous country-nephew, and Foible and Waitwell, the servants. The dialogue is exceptionally brilliant, and there are some highly entertaining scenes; while Lady Wishfort's display of 'bondoir Billingsgate' (as Meredith called it) when she has discovered how she has been tricked, is unequalled in its kind."*

3. Congreve's Art :

Congreve is a comic dramatist, and "the most shining figure" in that school of comedy, which is known as the Comedy of Manners. It is 'therefore' as a dramatist of 'manners' that Congreve is to be judged. He inherited the tradition of the artificial comedy started by Etheredge and firmly established by Wycherley. It presents the manners of the artificial society of gallants, and is a mocking image of a care-free life ; it is free at once from moralising realism and from all doctrinal intention. It is essentially the comedy of wit, and though Wycherley imported satire into it, there is more of irony than satire in the texture of the comedy of

* Oxford Companion to English Literature.

manners. It remained for Congreve, with his superior art, to give to this comedy its proper place in the history of English comic drama.

It must be remembered at the very outset that the Comedy of Manners is intellectual, and emotion has hardly any place in it. Consequently, the comic art here manifests itself neither in humour nor in satire, but in elegant raillery and brilliant wit. Congreve's plays are unmatched for their wit, and it is brilliancy of wit that is one of the elements of the comic art of Congreve.

A comedy, to possess artistic merit, must have a well constructed plot. The romantic comedy of Shakespeare does not indeed possess the rigid construction of the classical drama ; but, though the unities of time, place and action are conspicuous by their absence, in Shakespearean comedy, there is a unity of impression secured by the pervading quality of humour. The Jonsonian comedy is rigidly classical, and has all those unities which make for compactness, and it is pervaded all through by the spirit of satire. Congreve took sufficient pains with the construction of his plots. The unities of place and time are rigidly observed In *The Way of the World*, for instance, the scene is Lady Wishfort's house, (Acts III, IV & V), or a Chocolate-house (Act I) or St. James's Park (Act II), both the latter being near the house of Lady Wishfort. And the time of action exactly coincides with the time of performance. But the plots are generally loose ; they contain too many intrigues, and are unnecessarily complex on the one hand, and arbitrary and artificial on the other. Of all Congreve's plots, that of *The Way of the World* is the best knit ; but here also the *denouement* is achieved by an artificial device—

that of the "deed of conveyance of the whole estate of Arabella Languish."

Congreve possessed the gift of constructing comic characters and comic scenes. Though no one of Congreve's characters is a whole living personage as those of Shakespeare, there is hardly one, who as a personage of artificial comedy is not a triumph, from Sir Sampson Legend the festy father, Jeremy the witty servant, Tattle the frivolous Iran (all these characters figuring in *Love for Love*) to millamant the coquettish heroine, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, the boisterous country-knight, and Lady Wishfort, the vain woman "full of the vigour of fifty-five." Besides his power of constructing characters, Congreve possessed the gift of constructing comic scenes, effective on the stage. The scene in which Lady Witwoud is tricked by Foible, or that in which she pours her wrath on Foible,—the scene of the courtship of Mirabell or of the pretended courtship of Waitwell—each is in its own way a triumph on the comic stage.

The most important element of Congreve's comic art is his wit and his rich sparkling style. It is the bright scintillating talk replete with all the power of wit, that gives interest to his plays. In fact the whole power of Congreve is centred in airiness of fancy, spark of wit and a delicacy of pointed style eminently adopted to the expression of conventional conversation of the fine society of his time. "No English writer has better possessed the natural art of making witty people speak, of lending to the most idle of their remarks the piquant touch of the unexpected."

Congreve's Style

"The style of Congreve", says Hazlitt, "is inimitable nay, perfect; it is the highest model of comic dialogue." It

possesses in an eminent degree all those qualities which make for effectiveness on the stage. It is a product of artifice, but the artifice is so ingeniously concealed that it gives the semblance of art ; the dictum that art lies in concealing art applies to Congreve's prose style, [The worth and effectiveness of Congreve's comedies depend largely upon the charm of style, the subtle adaptation of language to character and situation, and the piquancy of the comic dialogue.]

(The prose style of Congreve is marked, first and foremost, by clearness, brevity, fluency and balance.) The words and phrases flow on limpidly and musically, falling sweetly upon the ears and producing a magical effect by their ease and grace. (As there is no superfluity or burden of surplus-age, so there is no obscurity or ambiguity. The style is a product of carefully elaborated art. It 'startles and waylays' by the bold and apt imagery, the balanced structure of sentences, the use of antithesis and alliteration,) and, last but not least, by its musical cadence. (It may be urged that some of these are mere artificial devices, and cannot impart spontaneity and naturalness to style. In Congreve's prose, these elements are so beautifully harmonised, and are so finely adapted to character and situation that they appear as natural to his style as the limbs are to the human body. It should be remembered in this connection that the prose of Congreve is the prose of comic dialogue, and the first requisite of such prose is that it must be effective on the stage and must ^{enchant} the audiences as soon as it is uttered. It must be lucid and immediately intelligible on the one hand, and on the other, polished, pointed and replete with sense and wit.) (Every page of Congreve's plays is full of brilliant conceits, paradoxes and antithesis that are a delight to the audience.

"One will melt in your mouth, and t'other set your teeth on edge : one is all pulp, and the other all core."

"Though it were a man whom he feared, or a woman whom he loved."

".....that the man should outlive the lover."

".....because the nodding husband would not wake, that e'er the watchful lover slept ?"

"A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion ; a worse had not answered to the purpose."

".....beauty is the lover's gift ; it is he bestows your charms."

"To your lover you owe the pleasure of hearing yourselves praised ; and to an echo the pleasure of hearing yourselves talk."

"Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while ; and as well bred as if we were not married at all."

"*Petulant.* thou art an epitomiser of words

Witwoud you are an annihilator of sense."

In a drama, again the language is adapted to character and situation ; and the manner in which it is varied to suit a character or a mood, shows the art of the dramatist. In Congreve's plays, it is the talk that reveals the character of the speaker. Foible would not speak the cultured language of Millamant. Lady Wishfort's manner of speaking while she is waiting impatiently for Sir Rowland (Act IV) is very different from her angry outburst at the discovery of Foible's deception. Congreve bestows scrupulous care upon every detail, and even a trivial talk becomes interesting by virtue of its wit and piquancy. —

“No English writer has better possessed the natural art of making witty people speak, of lending to the most idle of their remarks the piquant touch of the unexpected; but here nature is enhanced by the most artistic desire to give each word its proper value, by the sense of its connection with its fellows, and of the general harmony in which it plays its part.”]

The brief dialogue between Mirabell and Millamant, where Mirabell says that ‘beauty is lover’s gift’, shows, more than anything else in the play, their character and personality—their wit, their breeding and their culture. Millamant is the heroine of *The Way of the World*; her character is portrayed not by her action but by her talk. It is a work of genius indeed to make a woman’s manner of speech portray here. One feels sensible of her presence in every line of her speaking; “an air of bewitching whimsicality” hovers over the graceful personality of this comic heroine.

While speaking of Congreve’s style, Hazlitt says, “Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceits, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dullness. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up.....His works are a singular treat to those who have cultivated a taste for the niceties of English style.”

Congreve is not so much a creator of character as a creator of comic style; and in this respect he stands unequalled (except by Shaw two centuries later) in English comedy. Meredith says emphatically in his Essay on Comedy, “Where Congreve excels all his rivals is in his literary force, and a

succinctness peculiar to him. He had correct judgment, a correct ear, readiness of illustration within a narrow range, and copious language. He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural style. He is at once precise and valuable.....The flow of boudoir Billingsgate of Lady Wishfort is unmatched for the vigour and pointedness of the tongue. It spins along with a final ring like the voice of nature in a fury, and is indeed racy eloquence of the elevated fish wife.”)

5. Types of Comedy :

Comedy is defined as a stage-play of a light and amusing character with a happy conclusion to its plot. It is essentially the drama of real life, which adopts a humorous or familiar style, and depicts laughable characters and incidents. The classical comedies of ancient Greece and Rome were satiric in tone and depicted the follies and vices of men and women. The comic dramatist used the weapon of laughter to chastise fools and rogues.

Romance was introduced into the comedy by the Elizabethan dramatists, and a new kind of comedy—romantic comedy came into being. It has the elements of romance—gaiety, and freshness and love, and at the same time depicts amusing characters and incidents. It is a blend of romance and reality. Shakespeare's comedies are all romantic (with the exception of *The Taming of Shrew*), but each one of them contains realistic elements ; they depict on the one hand all the strangeness and beauty of romance, and on the other the amusing incidents of real life.

The Elizabethan theatre was resounding with the noise

and merriment of the Romantic Comedy, when there came a strident voice of protest from the classical Comedy of Humours scholar dramatist, Ben Jonson. He condemned the Romantic Comedy for its absurdities and fooleries, and showed in his *Every Man in his Humour* what a comedy ought to be. Jonson was a classical scholar and a satirist. His comedies were realistic and were of a classical pattern. He depicted in them amusing and wicked characters and exposed their follies and vices. His method was to single out the 'humour', or the oddity or mental habit of each of his characters, and exhibit it in action, with a view to ridiculing it. His comedies were based on 'humour'—one single aspect of character which lent itself to satiric treatment. The characterisation of Johnson was narrow and limited, and was opposed to that of the other dramatists of the period, who gave their characters full play, developing them spacially and endowing them with complexity. These other dramatists also made use of 'oddities', but they gave them to subordinate characters; Shakespeare gave humours to the Pistols and the Nyms. But Jonson bestows them on all his characters, and the plots of his comedy are the exhibitions of these 'humours'. His comedy is therefore called 'comedy of humours'. It is realistic, and satirical, and is based upon character, though only one single aspect of character.

These two types of comedy—romantic comedy and the realistic comedy of humours—continued till the closing of theatres in 1642. Sometimes, there was a mingling of the type—the 'humour' element being introduced in the romantic type.

After the Restoration, new influences shaped the English drama. The drama no longer reflected the life and thought

Comedy of Manners

of the nation; the theatres were no longer places of popular amusement. The theatre now belonged to the court, and the drama also represented the artificial life of the court and the upper classes of the society. The drama of the period, again, was modelled on, or influenced by the French drama. The springs of imagination and emotion that could produce real tragedy, were dried up, and an artificial type of tragedy—heroic tragedy—arose under French influence, made some stir, and then disappeared. A new type of comedy also appeared under French influence, but as it was impregnated by English spirit and reflected the manners of the elegant society of the English court, it became a distinct type of English comedy. It was concerned with the exhibition, not of character or 'humours', but of 'manners' or the refined habits of culture of the fashionable society of London.

6. Rise of the Comedy of Manners :

The London theatres were closed in 1642, and England remained under Puritan rule till 1660, the year of Restoration. During this period, moral austerity was imposed upon the nation, and spontaneous feelings and emotions were suppressed. The tension of will and emotion was artificially sustained during the Puritan rule by a religious and mystical exaltation of feeling and it gave way abruptly at the Restoration and was followed by a violent reaction. With the Restoration began a new society and a new literature. "The Puritan banned pleasure ; the Restoration re-instates it in all its rights, and its new-found liberty develops at once into licentiousness. Public festivals are re-established, popular entertainments authorised, and the theatres are re-opened. Manners are allowed to slip into the toleration of vice, and almost its encouragement."

With the fall of the Puritan rule, there swept over the country a wave of scorn and hate for the sentimental aspect of piety and for the mockery of a spiritual republic. The Restoration of the king was hailed with enthusiasm ; the aristocracy of birth resumed its privileged place and the court, organised round the person of the pleasure-loving king, became the centre of elegant life. The town, that is to say, the fashionable London, followed the ways of the court. Provincial England, remote and hidden away, did not share in the brilliant life of this little closed world. It was these conditions that favoured the growth of what may be called aristocratic literature.

The Elizabethan age had been a creative age, full of the vigour of imaginative and emotional life ; the Restoration emerging from the restraint exercised by the Puritans over all instinct, lacked that creative spirit and vigour. The sap of the nation's life was impoverished, and if any enthusiasm was left, it was in sensual pleasure. The creative spirit was gone and was replaced by critical spirit, which expressed itself in satire. Besides, foreign influence, especially French influence set its mark upon taste, fashions and manners, and penetrated into modes of thought and feeling. The literature of the Restoration, thus bore the impress of French influence both in its matter and form.

7. The Comedy of Manners :

These were the conditions which produced the comedy of manners. It deals with the elegant life of the upper classes, depicting the superficial manners of the courtly society rather than the deeper sides of human character. It has no regard for orthodox morality and is frankly immoral. It makes mockery fashionable, and displays a satirical attitude towards life.

It is marked by what was then regarded as genteel taste, and the men and women represented in it, seem to belong to a world, where nothing else exists but amorous intrigues. Plots and sub-plots are intricate, and centre round some intrigues of love, which is the main theme of the comedy. What goes by the name of love in the comedy of manners, has nothing ideal or romantic about it; it is not that pure sentiment that glorifies and elevates human nature. Love in the comedy of manners is mostly a gross physical passion, and adultery and seduction are a usual feature of this species of comedy. It is realistic and satiric in tone.

But its most distinguishing feature is its wit. Its smart comic dialogue, full of sparkling fancy and brilliant conceits and antitheses, is indeed a rich contribution to English theatre. In the comedy of manners, we find ourselves transported to a new world, where the best things are said and where the most amusing things happen. ("The wittiest remarks are always ready on the tongue, and the luckiest occasions are always at hand to give birth to the happiest conceptions. Sense makes strange havoc of nonsense. Refinement acts as a foil to affectation and affectation to ignorance. Sentence after sentence tells. We don't know which to admire most, the observation, or the answer to it.") In turning over the pages of the comedies of manners, we seem to "escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim and mirth and humour."

But the immorality that enters into the comedy of manners vitiates it, in spite of the defence of Lamb. Here the dramatists seek to make immorality the code of honourable life. Adultery is represented as "the calling of a fine gentleman, as a grace without which his character would be imperfect.....All the agreeable qualities are always given to the

gallant. All the contempt and aversion are the portion of the unfortunate husband. In all these cases the dramatist evidently does his best to make the person who commits the injury graceful, sensible and spirited, and the person who suffers it a fool, or a tyrant or both.'

It may however be said, in justice to the dramatists, that they were the creatures of their age, and represented life as they found it. The comedy of manners held up the mirror to court life of fashionable London ; the scene of every comedy was laid in London. When the scene was shifted from London to the country-side, as in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, it cast off its immoral tone, and painted, not the artificial ways of fashionable people, but the manners of the rural people. The comedy of manners, with its realism, humour, wit and brilliant comic dialogue, brought something new to the English stage ; and its immorality, being a feature of the age of Restoration, was soon cast aside, and it established itself as a distinct species of English comedy. Its best elements are found later in the comedies of Sheridan, Goldsmith and even Shaw.

8. Morality in the Comedy of Manners :

At no period in the history of England had morality sunk so low as in the years that followed the Restoration of Charles II. The moral license came as a reaction against the overstrained austerity imposed by the Puritan rulers. "The Restoration crushed the Puritan party and placed supreme power in the hands of a libertine. The political counter-revolution assisted the moral-counter-revolution. A period of wild and desperate dissoluteness followed. Even in remote manor-houses and hamlets the change was felt, but in London the outbreak of debauchery was

appalling, and in London the places most deeply infected were the Palace, the quarters inhabited by the aristocracy, and the Inns of Court. It was on the support of these parts of the town that the playhouses depended. The character of the drama became conformed to the character of its patrons. The comic poet was the mouthpiece of the most deeply corrupted part of a corrupted society. And in the plays before us (the comedies of manners) we find distilled and condensed, the essential spirit of the fashionable world during the Anti-Puritan reaction" (*Macaulay*). The comic poet laughed at decorum, took debauchery under his patronage and represented an affair of gallantry as an honourable distinction. (The comedy of manners is openly and frankly immoral, as if immorality is a usual feature of elegant life. The seducer of a married woman is endowed with all kinds of graces and accomplishments, whereas the husband is either held up to laughter as a cuckold, or represented as a villain, carrying on with another woman.) Mirabell, though living in sin with Mrs. Fainall, is represented as a brilliant, worthy gentleman, and is in the end rewarded for his gallantry with the hand of the beautiful Millamant; whereas the husband, Fainall, is represented as a villain, who deserves to be punished for being false to his wife. The indecency and immorality of the comedy of manners aroused the just indignation of Jeremy Collier, who condemned it in most vehement terms in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. He thus sums up his complaint against this type of comedy :

"To sum up the evidence. (A fine gentleman is a fine whoring, swearing, smutty, atheistical man. These

qualifications, it seems, complete the idea of honour.) This is the stage-test for quality, and those that can't stand it ought to be disclaimed..... Thus we see what a fine time lewd people have on the English stage. No censure, no mark of infamy, no mortification must touch them. They keep their honour untarnished, and carry off the advantage of their character. (They are set up for the standard of behaviour, and the masters of ceremony and sense. And at last, that the example may work the better, they generally make them rich and happy, and reward them with their own desires.”)

This is the general tone of the comedy of manners. Lamb put in a defence of this type of comedy by calling it ‘artificial’, and says that the world of this artificial comedy is “altogether a speculative scheme of things, which has no reference to the world that is.” Macaulay thus sums up Lamb’s argument: “They (characters of the comedy of manners) belong to the regions of pure comedy, where no cold morality reigns. When we are among them, we are among a chaotic people. We are not to judge them by our usages. No reverend institutions are insulted by their proceedings, for they have none among them. No peace of families is violated, for no ties of family exist among them. There is neither right nor wrong, gratitude or its opposite, claim or duty, paternity or sonship.”

.., Lamb’s argument, says Macaulay, “though ingenious is altogether sophistical”, for the world of the comedy of manners is not an unreal or imaginary world. (It presents the fashionable society of the age of Restoration in a realistic manner.) “Here the garb, the manners, the topics of conversation”, says Macaulay, (“are those of the real town and of the

passing day. The hero is in all superficial accomplishment exactly the fine gentleman whom every youth in the pit would gladly resemble. The heroine is the fine lady, whom every youth in the pit would gladly marry. The scene is laid in some place, which is as well-known to the audience as their own houses, in St. James's Park or Hyde Park or Westminster Hall." } *Act 2: sc. 1*

To say that art is not concerned with morality would take us to a very wide issue, which is out of the scope of our discussion. The fact remains however that the comedy of manners is definitely immoral. It is a different question whether there are extenuating and redeeming features to make us reconciled to this type of comedy in spite of its obvious immorality. The first point to notice is that in the hands of Congreve, "comedy is wholly intellectual and passionless". It does not stir our emotions as do the comedies of Shakespeare, and so its immorality passes us by, and does not strike deeply; secondly, its vulgar scenes, and immoral jokes are not introduced for the sake of their vulgarity or sensuality, but because they are witty and amusing. It is wit, and brilliancy of fancy and style, that compensate partly for the immorality of the comedy of manners.

9. The Elizabethan Comedy and the Comedy of Manners :

The difference between the Elizabethan Comedy and the Comedy of Manners is obvious and also natural. The comedy, more than any other form of literature, except the novel, is the product of its age, and because the Elizabethan age with its creative spirit and its heroic enthusiasm and passion differs substantially from the critical age of the Restoration, with its immorality and super-

ficial brilliancy, the comedies of the two periods not only exhibit different tempers and attitudes towards life, but adopt different methods of presentation and expression.

In the Elizabethan age, there are two dominant types of comedy—the romantic comedy of Shakespeare and the realistic comedy of Jonson. In the former, we have, on the one hand, all the romance, gaiety and freshness of life, and on the other a humorous exhibition of human follies and affectations. In the comedy of Jonson, we have a satirical exposure of human vices through the presentation of ‘humours’. Both are inspired by passion—that of idealism and love in Shakespeare and that of satiric indignation in Jonson. It is this warmth of passion that gives a universal appeal to the comedies of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Secondly, the characters, presented in these comedies, are of universal validity, because, though they have the characteristics of the Elizabethan age, they possess qualities of universal human nature. Thirdly, there is the creative impulse behind the Elizabethan comedy, presenting a rich variety of characters and situations in order to hold up the mirror to life.

In contrast with the rich poetic comedy of the Elizabethan age, the comedy of manners is narrow and superficial. It has neither the depth nor the range of the Elizabethan comedy. It is confined to a certain class of society—the fashionable class, and presents its superficial culture. It is critical, not creative; intellectual, not emotional. It never presents human nature in its essentials; it introduces to us a few well-dressed persons, who are concerned with amorous intrigues and whose only redeeming feature is that they can talk well. It is realistic and is dated, that is

to say that its characters cannot be imagined as living out of their own age or their own class :—hence it is narrow in its outlook. It is critical, in that it depicts satirically the characteristics of the fashionable people of the age ; but the satire lacks the fire and passion of Jonsonian comedy. The most damaging feature of the comedy of manners is its immorality. Though attempts have been made to extenuate this defect, the comedy of manners can never have a universal appeal, for it offends against abiding moral values. There is however one distinguishing quality of the comedy of manners, which not only makes it readable today, but has exercised a deep influence on the later English comedy, and that quality is its wit—bright scintillating wit, and the incisiveness, brilliancy and ease of its stage-dialogue. Congreve, it has been said, “sharpened the sword-play of it till the flash of it well-nigh blinds us to all considerations”.

Love is the primary concern of the romantic comedy of Shakespeare as well as of the Restoration comedy of manners—but what a difference ! Love is a spiritual exaltation with Shakespeare ; it is something physical and a matter of contract, with Congreve. We can know the difference when we contrast the love-scenes of Shakespeare and Congreve. There is something sublime—a spirit of complete self-surrender, which is the meaning of true love—in the words of Ferdinand and Miranda :

Ferdinand.

Hear my soul speak.

The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service ; there resides,
To make me slave to it ; and for your sake
Am I this patient log-man

...

Ferdinand.

Wherefore weep you ?

Miranda. At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer
What I desire to give ; and much less take,
What I shall die to want.

Compare with this scene of simple, innocent love, the bargaining scene between Mirabell and Millamant, which is considered to be the best scene of its type in Restoration comedy. There is a list of demands made by each, and the contract of marriage is made only when the demands are accepted.

Millamant.And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

Mirabell.These provisoes admitted, in other things, I may prove tractable and complying husband.

Of course these two scenes represent different types—one purely romantic, and the other realistic and witty :—and the measure of their difference is the measure of the difference between the Elizabethan comedy and the comedy of manners. And the style of the Elizabethan comedy is poetic, even when it is written in prose—e.g.

No, no, Orlando, men are April when they woo, December when they wed ; maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.

The comedy of manners is partly a descendant of the comedy of humours ; the emphasis is however shifted from the character of individual (in comedy of humours) to the ‘manners’ of society. Jonson presents the ‘humours’ and vices of individuals with the object of satirising them, whereas Congreve represents the manners of the fashionable society, with its wit as well as its immorality. Both the comedy of humours and the comedy of manners are

realistic, though the element of satire is not so pronounced in the comedy of manners as it is in the comedy of humours. The comedy of manners is remarkable for its brilliant wit, the comedy of humours, for its vigorous satire. The comedy of humours again, representing as it does, the vices and follies of man, has a timeless appeal, whereas the comedy of manners is 'dated', for it represents the manners of the fashionable society of England, during the period following the Restoration.

Thus, the comedy of manners is a new type of comedy which flourished after the Restoration, and though witty, and brilliant in its own way, lacks the vigorous vitality and the universal appeal of the Elizabethan comedy.

10. The meaning of the term 'manners' :

The title Comedy of Manners—is no doubt ultimately derived from the manners, social habits and conventions presented in a group of plays written during the post-Restoration period. But the word 'manners' here has a deeper significance. In the second act of Congreve's *Double Dealer*, Lady Froth is talking with Cynthia. Lady Froth says, "I vow Mellefont is a pretty gentleman, but methinks he wants a manner". "A manner ! What's that, madam ?" asks Cynthia. Lady Froth's answer is illuminating. "Some distinguishing quality, as for example, the bel air of Mr. Bisk ; the solemnity, yet complaisance of my lord." This quotation gives us a glimpse into the meaning of the word 'manner', from which the title 'Comedy of Manners' has been derived. 'Manners' mean something brilliant about the men and women of elegant society—some grace or habit of culture, some superficial element of refinement. The Comedy of Manners is thus very different from the

Comedy of Humours; the former depicts the habits of refinement of elegant society, while the latter presents the natural idiosyncracies of men and women of all classes.

11. The Comedy of Manners and the Comedy of Humours :

The Comedy of Manners, as its name suggests, is an entirely different species from the comedy of Jonson. There are no doubt some points of contact and similarity, but the line of demaraction is too clear to be mistaken. Both are realistic, and both attack unsocial elements, and are satiric; but while the comedy of manners satirises acquired follies, the comedy of humours deals with natural eccentricities or humours; while the former is mostly concerned with the superficialities of life, the latter searches out and displays the hidden recesses of human passions and desires. There may be humours in the plays of Etherege and Congreve, but these humours are not stressed as in the plays of Jonson; in the comedy of manners, humours are given to subordinate characters, whereas Jonson gives them to all his characters. There is moreover a marked change in the conception of humours; in Jonson the humours are exaggerated traits of character, whereas in the comedy of manners they are superficial oddities, derived from the conventions and usages of social life. The comedy of humors is a product of the English genius looking far backwards to the Moralities, while the comedy of manners, though reflecting English life, was strongly influenced by French writers, especially Moliere. The comedy of manners again lacks the earnestness of the comedy of humours. While Jonson 'strips the ragged follies of the time' and chastises them with bludgeon blows, the comedy of manners cynically presents the fashionable

life of the time. The passion and exuberance of Jonson is supplanted in Congreve by a polish and intellectual control, which replaces emotion by wit. The comedy of humours is therefore more profound, and as it appealed to the absolute standard of morality, it has a universal appeal. The comedy of manners has an open contempt for the ordinary standards of morality and is 'dated' because it reflects the superficial aspects of life at a particular time.

Jonson's comedy is essentially the comedy of satire. The comedy of manners does not confine itself to satire ; it is essentially the comedy of wit. Jonson's is the satire of exaggeration ; he attains his effect by crude and heavy blows. The comedy of manners was airy and delicate, and accordingly preferred to satirise by the power of wit (*i.e.* by showing the incongruity between two ideas or between an idea and an object).

Another point of difference is found in the styles of the two types of comedies. Jonson's style is poetic and full of passions ; the style of the comedy of manners is graceful and full of wit. The 'verbal pyrotechnics is at once "the glory and bane" of the comedy of manners—glory, because wit made for clarity of expression ; bane, because the standard changes. The weakness of the comedy of manners lies in the fact that it was written for a coterie—and its talk 'coterie talk'.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

12. The Title of the Play :

The Way of the World is a comedy, which reflects the ways of the fashionable world of London in the years following the Restoration, and satirises in a gentle way the vices and follies of the time. It is a comedy of artificial life and is more or less of a topical character. It does not deal with universal human nature, nor does it present life 'in widest commonalty spread'. It gives a picture of the life of a coterie, was written for a coterie and gives us coterie talk.

The comedy is called "The Way of the World", for it presents, not the ways of life in general, but the artificial life of the upper class society in the fashionable quarters of London. In this little closed world, there is not even a pretence of morality ; amorous intrigues seem to be the only business in this world ; serious issues of life do not enter here, nor is there any trace of the deeper passions and enthusiasms of the human soul ; all is frivolous and superficial, fashionable men and women talk scandal, tell falsehoods, and play tricks ; men seduce women, wives deceive husbands,—and all this is done with bravery and wit. This is the way of the fashionable world which is depicted in the play.

Mirabell is the hero of the play—indeed the right kind of hero of *The Way of the World*. The plot of the comedy centres round his intrigue to win the beautiful Millamant. He first makes sham addresses to the aunt, Lady Wishfort, in order to conceal his love to Millamant her niece. When this deception is discovered, he tries to play another trick upon the old lady. All this time he is living in sin with her daughter, who is a married woman. And then such a person is rewarded with the hand of

Millamant, because ‘the gentleman’ loves her ; and ‘this gentleman’ strangely becomes in the end the mouthpiece of wholesome advice on married life :

“From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed.”

If anybody has ‘stained the bridal bed’ in *The Way of the World*, it is Mirabell. But his seduction of Mrs. Fainall is a *feat* of gallantry. His next feat of gallantry is the winning of Millamant. This is the Way of the World presented in the comedy.

Fainall says that for a wife to cuckold her husband is the Way of the World.

“And I it seems am a husband, a rank husband ; and my wife a very, errant, rank wife—all in the Way of the World.”

When again Fainall’s affair with Mrs. Marwood is discovered, Fainall does not feel abashed. He bravely says, “If it must all come out, why let’em know it, ’tis but the Way of the World.”

Both Mirabell and Millamant know the ways of the world to which they belong. Hence in the bargaining scene, they promise to abjure the ways of fashionable life. “Each of them has seen the rocks which bring most marriages to ruin, and strives to avoid them.” Millamant says, “Good Mirabell, don’t let us be familiar or fond....nor go to Hyde Park the first Sunday on a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers ; and then never to be seen there together again ; as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after.” So Mirabell says, “I covenant that you admit....no she-friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy duck to wheedle you a fop—scrambling to the play in a mask—

then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out." Both Mirabell and Millamant know—one from experience and the other from instinct—that the ways of fashionable life are corrupt, and they must keep away from them in order to be honest and happy in their married life.

13. Construction of Plot in *The Way of the World*:

The Way of the World is essentially a comedy of manners, not a comedy of character nor one of incidents. The aim of the dramatist is to present on the stage a comic picture of the manners of the artificial life of his time, and therefore the plot of *The Way of the World* should be viewed from that standpoint.

The plot centres round one single intrigue—viz. Mirabell's effort to win Millamant, a rich and beautiful lady. Half of her inheritance is in the keeping of her old aunt Lady Wishfort, and she will receive it at her marriage only if she marries with her aunt's consent. Mirabell loves Millamant, but in order to conceal his love to Millamant, he makes sham addresses to her old aunt, Lady Wishfort. [The dramatist does not make it clear why Mirabell has done so].

It is with the discovery of Mirabell's deception that the plot opens. Mrs. Marwood, a society-lady, who poses to be a well-wisher of Lady Wishfort, has disclosed this deception to her. She has done so in Mirabell's plan order to take revenge on Mirabell, who has neglected her and rejected her advances. Now begins the plot. Lady Wishfort, old as she is, is eager to re-marry. Mirabell knows the weakness of the old lady, and makes a plan to trick her into giving

her consent to his marriage with Millamant. His servant Waitwell is to marry Foible the maid servant of Lady Waitwell, and is to personate Sir Rowland, uncle of Mirabell and to court Lady Waitwell.

The plan of Mirabell is put into execution. Waitwell marries Foible and assumes the character of Sir Rowland.

Mrs. Marwood overhears a conversation between Foible and Mrs. Fainall and comes to know about the plan of Mirabell. Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's mistress, and they together form a plan to enrich themselves at the expense of Lady Waitwell and her daughter, Mrs. Fainall.

Mirabell's plan defeated

Waitwell comes as Sir Rowland to make his addresses to Lady Waitwell, who receives him with a panting heart. But while he is declaring his passion to the old lady, she receives an anonymous letter which tells her of the deceit practised upon her. She is furious.

Mrs. Marwood's counter-plan failed

But immediately she is faced with another problem. Fainall threatens to divorce his wife, who is Mirabell's mistress. At Mrs. Marwood's intercession, Fainall agrees to a settlement on condition that Lady Wishfort will hand over to him her own and her daughter's estates and also half of the inheritance of Millamant. Lady Wishfort is in a panic; on the one hand there is the threat of social scandal, on the other, utter ruin. Most unexpectedly, Mirabell appears as her deliverer.

Here surprises wait for Lady Wishfort and for the audience. Millamant has agreed to marry Sir Wilfull Witwoud, as desired by Lady Wishfort. Fainall's demand

therefore of Millamant's inheritance cannot stand. Then comes another surprise. Mirabell produces a document, which turns out to be "a deed of conveyance of the whole estates real of Arabella Lanquish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell." Mrs. Fainall, therefore, cannot make a fresh disposal of her property, which she had already delivered, in trust, to Mirabell. So the plan of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood is failed.

Lady Wishfort is grateful to Mirabell for saving her name and fortune, and gladly gives her assent to his marriage with Millamant. (Sir Wilsul's Mirabell's triumph part in the affair was only a pretence to baffle Fainall). The comedy ends with the triumph of Mirabell and the discomfiture of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood.

14. Defects in the Plot :

Though the plot is elaborate and complicated, there are some obvious defects in its construction : (1) From the beginning, the plan of Mirabell appears to be the most important intrigue in the comedy ; and the intrigue is certainly amusing and fit for comic purpose. Lady Wishfort is an old woman, with a passion for marriage ; to expose and laugh at her ridiculous passion is indeed a fit subject of comedy. To execute his plan, he first gets his servant Waitwell married to Foible. Waitwell is then to assume the character of Sir Rowland and court Lady Wishfort. Foible, the maid servant of Lady Wishfort, acts as a go-between. The expectation of the audience is fully aroused. The idea of Mirabell is to trick the old woman into giving her consent to his marriage with Millamant. The

plan is put into execution. But the plan miscarries as the result of a counter-move by Mrs. Marwood. Thus, the plan of Mirabell, which occupies four acts of the play, produces practically nothing, so far as the main theme (winning of Millamant by Mirabell) is concerned. Nothing comes out if it—nothing hangs on it. It begins elaborately, but ends in a void. The plot takes a different turn altogether in Act V. (2) The denouement, or resolution of the comedy is brought about most unexpectedly and artificially by a cheap device—the production of an old document. Fainall has placed Lady Wishfort in a quandary :—the old lady is faced with either of the two alternatives—scandal and ruin. Mirabell, the hero, having failed in his first plan, must save her, in order to bring the play to a happy termination. Hence the cheap device of “a deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella Langush”. (3) The characters of Petulant and Witwoud are wholly irrelevant to the plot. They have been introduced just to make fun and give a side-view of “the world”, “the way” of which is presented in the comedy.

15. Sources of the Comic in *The Way of the World* :

The great end of comedy, according to Dr. Johnson, is to make an audience merry by provoking laughter. A comedy that fails to arouse laughter and amuse the audience is no comedy at all. Laughter may be aroused by various means ; it may arise from a silly trick or a comic or satiric representation of human follies. The secret of laughter in a comedy lies in the incongruity between two facts, two ideas or two associations”. The incongruity suggests a contrast, an opposition between one thing and another ; when a thing is exaggerated above normal pro-

portions, or falls below the normal type, there is incongruity, and its exhibition gives rise to laughter. When, for instance, Lady Wishfort, an old woman of fifty-five, is found struggling at her toilet to repair the ravages of age with paints and powders, we are moved to laughter because her weakness and vanity are exaggerated above normal proportions. When Fainall says to Petulant that he is ‘very cruel’ to send the ladies away, Petulant replies, “All’s one let it pass—I have a humour to be cruel.” The reply of Petulant provokes laughter, because it shows his impudent pretension.

The Way of the World is a comedy of manners, which presents on the one hand the follies of fashion, and on the other, the elegant artificialities of polite society. The presentation is comic, laughter being aroused by the skilful handling of situations, and by the exhibition of the incongruities and eccentricities of character. Lady Wishfort, with her vain attempts to conceal the ravages of time, is a fit character for comedy. Though she is an old woman of fifty-five, she has the cravings of youthful passion and is eager to secure a husband. Nothing can be more amusing than the panting impatience of the old lady when she hears of the impending visit of Sir Rowland; and the scene in which Waitwell presenting Sir Rowland makes love to Lady Wishfort makes the sides burst almost with laughter. There is dramatic irony here, for the real identity of Rowland is known to the audience but not known to the lady. The situation is intensely interesting and amusing. Here is a servant, already married and married to her own maid servant, making love to Lady Wishfort; and she is an old woman burning with

passion to lead him to the altar as soon as possible. The incongruities of characters as well as the follies of old age provide fit materials of comedy.

The contrast between the brilliant town-coquette Millamant and the rude country knight Sir Wilfull Witwoud who has been directed by Lady Wishfort to make his addresses to her, is a fine bit of comedy. Millamant is repeating verses of Suckling :

I prithee, spare me, gentle boy
Press me no more for that slight toy.

Sir Wilfull thinks that she is addressing him, and replies, "Anan ? Cousin, your servant." Again, Millamant, referring to the poet, exclaims, "Normal, easy Suckling !" Sir Wilfull has not heard of the poet Suckling, and takes the word 'suckling' in its literal sense—*i.e.* a child that sucks at its mother's breast. He replies :

"Anan ? Suckling ? No sucking neither, cousin, nor stripling ; I thank Heaven, I'm no minor."

There is an atmosphere of satire pervading the whole comedy, but it is never heavy or biting. The satire is specially directed against those who have vain pretensions of culture, and try to obtain entrance into the world of fashion and elegance. Such are Petulant and Witwoud ; these characters, as soon as they open their mouth, prove themselves vain and empty fools. They always appear in pair, and complement each other in their witless fooleries. They arouse laughter, because they are brainless fops, trying to masquerade as witty gallants. What can be more amusing than Petulant's efforts to obtain a place in the fashionable world by allowing 'coach hire and

something more' to 'trulls' to call on him once a day at public places.

Lastly, *The Way of the World* is a feast of wit, which imparts a distinguishing flavour to its style. The brilliant conceits and antitheses, while they amuse us, give us intellectual pleasure by their clever twists and bright play of fancy. When Betty says that the ladies are gone in great anger, Petulant replies,

"Enough, let them trundle. Anger helps complexion, saves paint."

The whole situation is comic : the 'ladies' were none but trulls, hired by Petulant himself, who wanted to show that he was sought by 'ladies'. When they called on him at the chocolate house, he did not meet them, and they went away in seeming anger. The remark of Petulant is a fine instance of wit ; it shows not only his pretended annoyance but a bright play of fancy. The bargaining scene between Mirabell and Millamant would be otherwise tame, but for its sparkling wit. In *The Way of the World*, every character has a share of wit, but it is not of a uniform style. The wit is adapted, as it ought to be, to the character of each individual. Lady Wishfort's 'green sickness' speaks in a different style from that of the cultured sweetness of Millamant. Much of the interest of the comedy of *The Way of the World* depends upon its scintillating wit.

16. Wit in *The Way of the World* :

The comedy of manners is generally distinguished by Wit, which provokes a gentle smile by its cleverness and brilliancy of invention. Wit is intellectual, and consists in a play of ideas and in brilliant turns and twists of words and phrases. *The Way of the World* shows Congreve's wit

at its best ; it delights by its aptness and fancy, it surprises by its unexpectedness, and it startles by its boldness. Its keynote is struck at the very outset when Fainall says to Mirabell :

“The coldness of a losing gamester lessens the pleasure of the winner. I’d no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune, than I’d make love to a woman, who under-valued the loss of her reputation.”

Even Petulant’s remark delights by its aptness and unexpectedness :

Betty. They are gone, sir, in great anger.

Petulant. Enough, let ‘em trundle. Anger helps complexion, saves paint.

Mirabell’s description of the old woman’s (Lady Wishfort’s) appetite shows aptness of expression and boldness of imagery :

“....’tis the green sickness of a second childhood ; and like the faint offer of a later spring, serves but to usher in the fall, and withers in an affected bloom !”

The boldness of Mirabell’s remark startles by its unexpectedness, and delights by its aptness :

“Beauty is the lover’s gift ; ’tis he who bestows your charms. Your glass is all cheat.”

Again, the boldness of fancy in the following sentence (uttered by Mirabell in a soliloquy) is striking :

“A fellow that lives in a windmill has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman.”

“Every page” (of Congrēve), says Hazlitt, “presents a shower of brilliant conceits, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dull-

ness." Every person in *The Way of the World* displays his fund of wit, appropriate to his or her character. Witwoud is a fool, who makes a pretension to culture and is always after similitudes to display his brilliancy of wit and invention. When Mirabell remarks that Witwoud is free with his friend's acquaintance, Witwoud replies :

"Aye, aye ! friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting."

The dialogue between Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood at the opening of Act II contains witty turns of words and phrases, appropriate to their character—Mrs. Fainall, once the beloved mistress of Mirabell, and now losing her charm in his eyes, and Mrs. Marwood, who, neglected by Mirabell, has become the mistress of Fainall :

Mrs. Fainall. and when they cease to love, they loathe ; they look upon us with horror and distaste : they meet us like the ghosts of what we were, and as such fly from us.

Mrs. Marwood. . . . To pass our youth in dull indifference, to refuse the sweets of life because they once must leave us, is as preposterous as to wish to have been born old, because one day we must be old. For my part, my youth may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession.

Foible, the maid-servant' is witty too, with bright faney :

Lady Wishfort. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

Foible. Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.

Lady Wishfort. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes ; or I shall never keep up to my picture.

Foible. I warrant you, madam ; a little art once made your picture like you ; and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam. (Act III)

Sir Wilful's plain country-dialect is contrasted with the artificial 'lingo' of his half-brother :

Sir Wilful. What, Tony, i'faith ! What, dost thou not know me ? By our Lady, nor I thee, thou art so be-cravatey and be-periwigged. 'Sheart, why dost not speak ? Art thou overjoyed ?

Witwoud. Odso, brother, is it you ? Your servant, brother.

Sir Wilful. Your servant ! Why, yours, sir. Your servant again. 'Sheart, and your friend and servant to that—and a—(*puff*) and a flap dragon for your service.

The play is thus a full banquet of wit, where each dish has a different flavour, and each is agreeable, and satisfies.

17. Characterisation in *The Way of the World* :

The comedy of manners deals rather with the manners of men and women than with their character, and the interest is shifted from the characters of individuals to the manners of the society. *The Way of the World*, as its very title indicates, gives us a glimpse of the artificial life of the elegant society of the age of Restoration. The dramatist therefore shows the artificial polish and culture of men and women rather than their inward character, their habits

and ways of life rather than their deeper feelings and emotions. And again, the dramatist seeks to satirise the vices and affectations of men and women, and so we find in *The Way of the World* those aspects of character which are fit subjects of comic ridicule. We cannot expect to find here a deep or even a full-length study of human character. There is here the town-coquette, Millamant, with her wit and polish, or the vain old woman, Lady Wishfort, with her 'green sickness', but never a Rosalind with her romantic ardent passion nor a Miranda with her charming simplicity and innocence. The characters of *The Way of the World* are also products of an artificial society, and though their ways and habits have a superficial polish, they have hardly any depth or breadth of character. The characterisation in *The Way of the World* is thus of a superficial nature, its aim being to depict 'manners' and not the deeper elements of life and character. Some typical persons have been grouped together in the play to exhibit the way of the artificial world. What is the main interest in the artificial world? Amorous intrigue—not love as a pure and deep passion. Hence we have as its hero, a rake, Mirabell, possessed indeed of certain superficial graces. Its heroine is a town-coquette, Millamant, very handsome, very brilliant, and very witty—but a coquette all the same. This young and beautiful lady is contrasted with an old lady, Lady Wishfort, who in her old age has the passion of youth. The brilliant rake Mirabell is contrasted with the villainous rake Fainall. There are further contrasts (1) between the mistress of Fainall, Mrs. Marwood and the mistress of Mirabell, Mrs. Fainall, (2) between Witwoud and Petulant on

the one hand, and Sir Wilful on the other, and (3) between the clever Foible and the obedient Mincing.

Each character is individualised. Both Mirabell and Fainall are rakes, both want to trick Lady Wishfort; but Mirabell, being the hero of the comedy, is given some attractive traits of superficial brilliancy; and Fainall, being the villain of the piece, is represented as a greedy selfish fellow. The wit in the play is also individualised and adjusted to the character of the individual; in fact, the talk of a person reflects his nature, culture and rank. Hence, though the characterisation in *The Way of the World* is of a superficial nature—and it could not be otherwise, considering the aim of the play—yet within its narrow limits, it is appropriate. It may however be pointed out that the interest of the play depends not upon its characterisation, but upon the brilliancy of its wit. The characters, whether they are heroes or heroines, rakes or fools, are all fine speakers; they are never tame or dull.

18. Characters of the Play :

Millamant.

Hazlitt calls Millamant “the ideal heroine of the comedy of *high life*”—i.e. of artificial and fashionable life. She represents “the finest idea of artificial life”. She has all those superficial graces and accomplishments, which can dazzle the eyes of onlookers and attract a crowd of admirers. She is handsome, and is always decently dressed. She knows the art of dressing and decorating herself, so that she may appear to best advantage. She has not that natural colouring—the colour that nature herself has blended in Perdita of *Winter's Tale*;—her colouring is that of the skilful mixture of paints and

powders which are known only to the highly fashionable society. She is a well-bred, polished lady, who reads Suckling and other Restoration poets, and dresses her hair with love-epistles received from her many admirers ; she knows full well the art of coquetry, for the admirers follow her, hoping still to win her favour. Though she loves Mirabell, yet she would not deny herself the pleasure of being admired and adored by a crowd of devoted followers. She is the cynosure of all eyes, the centre of attraction in the fashionable world. When she appears in public, she is usually surrounded by her admirers. When she comes to St. James's Park, Mirabell says, "Here she comes in faith full sail, with her fan spread and streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders." On this occasion only, by way of exception, she is not accompanied by her admirers—so Mirabell adds, "Ha, no, I cry her mercy." She is conscious of her beauty and of the power her beauty gives. She holds her admirers by her glance and by her wit, and feels a sense of exultation.

Milla. No, now I think on't I am pleased. For I gave you same pain.

Mira. Does that please you ?

Milla. Infinitely, I love to give pain.

Mira. You would affect a cruelty which is not in your nature ; your true vanity is in the power of pleasing.

Milla. O I ask your pardon for that—one's cruelty is one's power, and when one parts with cruelty, one parts with one's power.

Meredith therefore says that "Millamant is a perfect portrait of a coquette, both in her resistance to Mirabell, and the manner of her surrender, and also in her tongue.

But there is a deeper side to her character which is but feebly touched in the play. She is the one single character in the play, who has so far remained untouched by the corruption and immorality of the world in which she lives. She has hitherto "walked on in maiden meditation fancy free"; but she has also like other women like Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, been attracted by the superficial glamour of that gentlemanly blackguard, Mirabell. She is however endowed with sweet reasonableness and commonsense. She sees through the foolish pedantry of Witwoud as well as the false pretension of Mrs. Marwood. She is more than a match for Mirabell; when Mirabell says that 'beauty is the lover's gift', Millamant laughs and replies : :

"O the vanity of these men !.....Lord, what is a lover that it can give ? Why, one makes as lovers fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases."

Millamant possesses again that supreme gift of wit which is the distinguishing quality of every member of fashionable society. She is never at loss to find the most fitting reply or a slashing repartee. She floors Mrs. Marwood, who hints that the secret of Mirabell's love for Millamant is known to all. Millamant makes a frontal attack, saying

"Poor Mirabell ! His constancy to me has destroyed his complaisance for all the world beside."

Again, through the song, which 'is agreeable to her humour' she completely overthrows Mrs. Marwood,

If there's delight, 'tis when I see
The heart which others bleed for bleed for me.

Millamant is indeed the ideal heroine of the comedy of high life. There is nothing in her about the serious business of life. She is "nothing but a fine lady; and all her airs and affectations would be blown away with the first breath of misfortune. Envious in drawing-rooms, adorable at her toilette, fashion, like witch, has thrown a spell around her, but if that spell were broken, her power of fascination would be gone." Nevertheless, there is in her a strain of genuineness and truth, and she deserves better than being handed over to that refined rake, Mirabell. But if we are allowed to look forward beyond the play, we hope Mirabell will reform under the influence of his wife.

Mirabell.

Mirabell is a typical gallant of the age of Restoration. He is fashionable, talks smartly, and has certain superficial graces and accomplishments which easily attract women. All the ladies in the play, including Lady Wishfort, have fallen victims to his irresistible charm. And he has seduced a widow, and while continuing to live in sin with her (Mr. Fainall) even after her re-marriage, pays pretended courtship to her old mother (Lady Wishfort), in order to cover his real design upon another lady (Mrs. Millamant). Nothing can be more despicable than the conduct of Mirabell, who has neither any principle nor any morality. To seduce a woman is to him a feat of gallantry, to trick an old lady, a huge joke. All the same, he is the hero of the play, and is therefore given some attractive features in order to reconcile us to his triumph in the end.

Mirabell is in love with Mrs. Millamant, but we cannot understand the nature of this love. He is still continu-

ing his affair with a married woman (Mrs. Fainall); perhaps he is now tired of her, and is trying to possess the handsome Mrs. Millamant, with her rich legacy. And because her aunt Lady Wishfort does not approve of him, he makes a plan to trick her into giving her consent. Though the plan fails, Mirabell succeeds in winning Millamant through the good grace of Sir Wilfull who obligingly gives up his claim :

“ ‘Sheart, aunt, I have no mind to marry. My cousin’s a fine lady, and the gentleman loves her, and she loves him, and they deserve one another.’ ”

So the gentleman blackguard is rewarded in the end with the hand of Millamant, for all his dastardly acts.

There is an obvious contrast between Mirabell and Fainall. There is hardly anything to choose between them, except that Mirabell, being the hero of the play, is given some attractive features, and that Fainall, being the villain of the piece, is made deliberately repulsive. Both are immoral and unprincipled. (1) Mirabell has seduced a widow, and when he was afraid that she might have a baby, he got her married to Fainall, instead of marrying her himself; and after her marriage also, he continues to be her lover. Fainall, on the other hand, has seduced a maid, Mrs. Marwood, whom he at least promises to marry after divorcing Mrs. Fainall. (2) Mirabell plays a trick on Lady Wishfort in order to force her to consent to his marriage with Millamant, so that Millamant may marry him and bring him her full inheritance. Thus Mirabell plays a dirty trick on Lady Wishfort for the hand and the fortune of Millamant. Fainall discovers the adultery of his wife and thus tries to blackmail Lady Wishfort. Both

are rogues, equally immoral and equally unprincipled, but Fainall has to suffer because he happens to be the villain of the play. At any rate, Fainall is not a hypocrite like Mirabell, who himself 'staining the bridal bed' of Fainall, has the cheek to utter the following lines of warning :

"From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed :
For each deceiver to his cost may find
That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind "

Lady Wishfort.

Lady Wishfort is an old woman of fifty-five ; but she wants to hide the wrinkles of her age behind paints and powders. She has one face in the privacy of her own apartment, and another when she comes out in public. Sir Wilful once says to Mirabell,

"Harkee, she dare not frown - desperately, because her face is none of her own ; 'sheart, an' she should, her forehead would wrinkle like the coat of a cream cheese."

Besides, she has all the ardent passion of youth, and longs to marry again. This green sickness of the old lady provides the theme of comic ridicule in the play ; in fact, the main intrigue of the comedy centres round this ludicrous 'humour' of Lady Wishfort.

The toilet scene of Lady Wishfort and the scene of her courtship by Waitwell, personating Sir Rowlad, are the two most amusing scenes of the play. Lady Wishfort is perhaps the most interesting character in the comedy, for her vanity and ridiculous passion, more than anything else, create fun and provide matter for gentle satire. She is a woman of fifty-five, but tries to look younger by means of artificial aids. She carefully makes up her face

to receive Sir Rowland, but she becomes very much upset when Foible tells her (falsely of course) how Mirabell has abused her.

Lady Wishfort. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

Foible. Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.

Lady Wishfort. Let me see the glass—Cracks, sayst thou ? Why, I am arrantly flayed. I look like an old pealed wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes ; or I shall never keep up to my picture.

Foible. I warrant you, madam ; a little art once made your picture like you, and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam.

The climax of comedy is reached in the scene between Lady Wishfort and Waitwell personating Sir Rowland—comedy arising out of the incongruity between the ludicrous passion and excitement of Lady Wishfort and the counterfeit gallantry and vehemence of the false Sir Rowland.

Soon however Lady Wishfort is disillusioned. Sir Rowland turns out to be no more than Mirabell's servant. When she learns the truth she becomes a veritable fury. Her indignation falls like a torrent over the head of Foible :

“Out of my house, out of my house, thou viper, thou serpent.”

The weakness of Lady Wishfort is thoroughly exposed. One of the demands of Fainall to prevent the scandal of

divorce was that Lady Wishfort must bind herself never to marry, and she made a piteous appeal to mitigate that demand :

Fainall. You shall enjoy your proper estate during life, on condition you oblige yourself never to marry.

Lady Wishfort. Never to marry ?

Mrs. Marwood. That condition, I dare answer, my lady will consent to without difficulty.....Besides, madam, when we retire to our pastoral solitudes we shall bid adieu to all other thoughts.

Lady Wishfort. Ay, that's true, but in case of necessity, as of health, or some such emergency—

No doubt, Lady Wishfort is saved from this quandary by Mirabell, but we are sure she is cured of her green sickness, and will not again desire to marry. This is what is known as comic purgation.

Sir Wilfull.

Sir Wilfull represents the country gentleman of the period, full of vitality and vigour, but lacking the genteel manners of the town. He is placed in contrast with Mirabell, the town gentleman. Mirabell easily attracts by his superior polish and refinement—but is not his brillancy superficial ? He lives in sin with Mrs. Fainall and has pretended to court her mother, in order to hide his love for Millamant. Can we call him a worthy gentleman in any sense—keeping a mistress (who is a married woman), paying pretended addresses to her mother, and making love to another woman (Millamant) ? Sir Wilfull, though vulgar and boorish, is good at heart, and through pure goodness helps Mirabell in securing the goodwill of Lady Wishfort. In spite of his illiteracy and lack of polish, he is a better man than Mirabell.

The contrast between Sir Wilfull and his half-brother Witwoud shows the superiority of the genuine and hearty country-gentleman over the pretentious fop of the town. The brief part played by Sir Wilfull not only helps in disentangling the knot of the comedy, but shows him to be a worthy fellow, though rude and uncultured.

Witwoud and Petulant.

Witwoud and Petulant are foolish dandies of the elegant society. They are in some measure humourous characters—Witwoud affecting elegant speech, with his ‘similitudes’, and Petulant parading his success in woman-hunting. Mostly they come in pair, and serve as foils to each other. They are like flies buzzing about in fashionable society, and represent its most frivolous aspect (just as Mirabell and Millamant represent its brilliancy and polish).

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
RALPH, EARL OF MONTAGUE, &c.

My Lord,

Whether the world will arraign me of vanity, or not, that I have presumed to dedicate this comedy to your lordship, I am yet in doubt: though it may be it is some degree of vanity even to doubt of it. One who has at any time had the honour of your lordship's conversation, cannot be supposed to think very meanly of that which he would prefer to your perusal: yet it were to incur the imputation of too much sufficiency, to pretend to such a merit as might abide the test of your lordship's censure.

Whatever value may be wanting to this play while yet it is mine, will be sufficiently made up to it, when it is once become your lordship's; and it is my security, that I cannot have over-rated it more by my dedication, than your lordship will dignify it by your patronage.

That it succeeded on the stage, was almost beyond my expectation; for but little of it was prepared for that general taste which seems now to be predominant in the palates of our audience.

Those characters which are meant to be ridiculed in most of our comedies, are of fools so gross, that in my

humble opinion, they should rather disturb than divert the well-natured and reflecting part of an audience ; they are rather objects of charity than contempt ; and instead of moving our mirth, they ought very often to excite our compassion.

This reflection moved me to design some characters, which should appear ridiculous not so much through a natural folly (which is incorrigible, and therefore not proper for the stage) as through an affected wit ; a wit, which at the same time that it is affected, is also false. As there is some difficulty in the formation of a character of this nature, so there is some hazard which attends the progress of its success, upon the stage : for many come to a play, so overcharged with criticism, that they very often let fly their censure, when through their rashness they have mistaken their aim. This I had occasion lately to observe : for this play had been acted two or three days before some of these hasty judges could find the leisure to distinguish betwixt the character of a Witwoud and a Truewit.

I must beg your lordship's pardon for this digression from the true course of this epistle ; but that it may not seem altogether impertinent, I beg, that I may plead the occasion of it, in part of that excuse of which I stand in need, for recommending this comedy to your protection. It is only by the countenance of your lordship, and the few so qualified : that such who write with care and pains can hope to be distinguished : for the prostituted name of *poet* promiscuously levels all that bear it.

Terence, the most correct writer in the world, had a Scipio and a Lelius, if not to assist him, at least to support

him in his reputation : and notwithstanding his extraordinary merit, it may be, their countenance was not more than necessary.

The purity of his style, the delicacy of his turns, and the justness of his characters, were all of them beauties, which the greater part of his audience were incapable of tasting : some of the coarsest strokes of Plautus, so severely censured by Horace, were more likely to affect the multitude ; such, who come with expectation to laugh at the last act of a play, and are better entertained with two or three unseasonable jests, than with the artful solution of the fable.

As Terence excelled in his performances, so had he great advantages to encourage his undertakings ; for he built most on the foundations of Menander : his plots were generally modelled, and his characters ready drawn to his hand. He copied Menander ; and Menander had no less light in the formation of his characters, from the observations of Theophrastus, of whom he was a disciple ; and Theophrastus, it is known, was not only the disciple, but the immediate successor of Aristotle, the first and greatest judge of poetry. These were great models to design by ; and the further advantage which Terence possessed, towards giving his plays the due ornaments of purity of style and justness of manners, was not less considerable, from the freedom of conversation, which was permitted him with Lelius and Scipio, two of the greatest and most polite men of his age. And indeed, the privilege of such a conversation is the only certain means of attaining to the perfection of dialogue.

If it has happened in any part of this comedy, that I have gained a turn of style, or expression more correct, or at least more corrigible than in those which I have formerly written, I must, with equal pride and gratitude, ascribe it to the honour of your lordship's admitting me into your conversation, and that of a society where everybody else was so well worthy of you, in your retirement last summer from the town: for it was immediately after, that this comedy was written. If I have failed in my performance, it is only to be regretted, where there were so many, not inferior either to a Scipio or a Lelius, that there should be one wanting, equal in capacity to a Terence.

If I am not mistaken, poetry is almost the only art which has not yet laid claim to your lordship's patronage. Architecture and painting, to the great honour of our country, have flourished under your influence and protection. In the meantime, poetry, the eldest sister of all arts, and parent of most, seems to have resigned her birthright, by having neglected to pay her duty to your lordship; and by permitting others of a later extraction to prepossess that place in your esteem, to which none can pretend a better title. Poetry, in its nature, is sacred to the good and great; the relation between them is reciprocal, and they are ever propitious to it. It is the privilege of poetry to address to them, and it is their prerogative alone to give it protection.

This received maxim is a general apology for all writers who consecrate their labours to great men: but I could wish, at this time, that this address were exempted from the common pretence of all dedications; and that as I can

distinguish your lordship even among the most deserving, so this offering might become remarkable by some particular instance of respect, which should assure your lordship that I am, with all due sense of your extreme worthiness and humanity,

My Lord,
Your Lordship's most obedient
and most obliged humble servant,
Will. Congreve.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MEN

Fainall, in love with Mrs. *Marwood*.

Mirabell, in love with Mrs. *Millamant*.

Witwoud } followers of Mrs. *Millamant*.
Petulant }

Sir *Wilful Witwoud*, half-brother to *Witwoud*, and nephew to
Lady *Wishfort*.

Waitwell, servant to *Mirabell*.

WOMEN

Lady *Wishfort*, enemy to *Mirabell*, for having falsely pre-
tended love to her.

Mrs. *Millamant*, a fine lady, niece to Lady *Wishfort*, and
loves *Mirabell*.

Mrs. *Marwood*, friend to Mr. *Fainall*, and likes *Mirabell*.

Mrs. *Fainall*, daughter to Lady *Wishfort*, and wife to *Fainall*,
formerly friend to *Mirabell*.

Foible, woman to Lady *Wishfort*.

Mincing, woman to Mrs. *Millamant*.

Betty, waiting-woman at the Chocolate-house.

Peg, waiting-woman to Lady *Wishfort*.

Dancers, Footmen, and Attendants.

SCENE—LONDON

The time equal to that of the presentation.

PROLOGUE

Of those few fools, who with ill stars are cursed,
Sure scribbling fools, called poets, fare the worst :
For they're a sort of fools which Fortune makes,
And after she has made 'em fools, forsakes.
With Nature's oafs 'tis quite a different case,
For Fortune favours all her idiot race :
In her own nest the Cuckoo eggs we find,
O'er which she broods to hatch the Changeling kind.
No portion for her own she has to spare,
So much she doats on her adopted care.

Poets are bubbles, by the town drawn in,
Suffered at first some trifling stakes to win :
But what unequal hazards do they run !
Each time they write they venture all they've won :
The squire that's buttered still, is sure to be undone.
This author, heretofore, has found your favour,
But pleads no merit from his past behaviour.
To build on that might prove a vain presumption,
Should grants to poets made, admit resumption :
And in Parnassus he must lose his seat,
If that be found a forfeited estate.

He owns, with toil, he wrought the following scenes,
But if they're naught ne'er spare him for his pains :
Damn him the more ; have no commiseration
For dullness on mature deliberation.

He swears he'll not resent one hissed-off scene,
Nor, like those peevish wits, his play maintain,
Who, to assert their sense, your taste arraign.
Some plot we think he has, and some new thought :
Some humour too, no farce ; but that's a fault.
Satire, he thinks, you ought not to expect ;
For so reformed a town, who dares correct ?
To please, this time, has been his sole pretence,
He'll not instruct, lest it should give offence.
Should he by chance a knave or fool expose,
That hurts none here, sure here are none of those.
In short, our play shall (with your leave to show it)
Give you one instance of a passive poet.
Who to your judgments yields all resignation ;
So save or damn, after your own discretion.

ACT ONE
A Chocolate-House

[1] *Mirabell and Fainall rising from cards, Betty waiting.*

Mira. You are a fortunate man, Mr. Fainall.

Fain. Have we done ?

Mira. What you please. I 'll play on to entertain you.

Fain. No, I 'll give you your revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent ; you are thinking of something else now, and play too negligently ; the coldness of a losing gamester lessens the pleasure of the winner. I 'd no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune, than I 'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation.

Mira. You have a taste extremely delicate, and are for refining on your pleasures.

Fain. Prithee, why so reserved ? Something has put you out of humour.

Mira. Not at all : I happen to be grave to-day ; and you are gay ; that 's all.

Fain. Confess, Millamant and you quarrelled last night, after I left you ; my fair cousin has some humours that would tempt the patience of a Stoic. What, some coxcomb came in and was well received by her, while you were by ?

Mira. Witwoud and Petulant; and what was worse, her aunt, your wife's mother, my evil genius; or to sum up all in her own name, my old Lady Wishfort came in—

Fain. Oh, there it is then—she has a lasting passion for you, and with reason.—What, then my wife was there?

Mira. Yes, and Mrs. Marwood and three or four more, whom I never saw before; seeing me, they all put on their grave faces, whispered to one another; then complained aloud of the vapours, and after fell into a profound silence.

Fain. They had a mind to be rid of you.

Mira. For which reason I resolved not to stir. At last the good old lady broke through her painful taciturnity, with an invective against long visits. I would not have understood her, but Millamant joining in the argument, I rose and with a constrained smile told her I thought nothing was so easy as to know when a visit began to be troublesome; she reddened, and I withdrew, without expecting her reply.

Fain. You were to blame to resent what she spoke only in compliance with her aunt.

Mira. She is more mistress of herself, than to be under the necessity of such a resignation.

Fain. What? though half her fortune depends upon her marrying with my lady's approbation?

Mira. I was then in such a humour, that I should have been better pleased if she had been less discreet.

Fain. Now I remember, I wonder not they were weary of you ; last night was one of their cabal-nights ; they have 'em three times a week, and meet by turns, at one another's apartments, where they come together like the corner's inquest, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week. You and I are excluded ; and it was once proposed that all the male sex should be excepted ; but somebody moved that to avoid scandal there might be one man of the community ; upon which motion Witwoud and Petulant were enrolled members.

Mira. And who may have been the foundress of this sect ? My Lady Wishfort, I warrant, who publishes her detestation of mankind ; and full of the vigour of fifty-five, declares for a friend and ratafia ; and let posterity shift for itself, she 'll breed no more.

Fain. The discovery of your sham addresses to her, to conceal your love to her niece, has provoked this separation : had you dissembled better, things might have continued in the state of nature.

Mira. I did as much as man could, with any reasonable conscience ; I proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her, and was guilty of a song in her commendation. Nay, I got a friend to put her into a lampoon, and compliment her with the imputation of an affair with a young fellow, which I carried so far, that I told her the malicious town took notice that she was grown fat of a sudden ; and when she lay in of a dropsy, persuaded her she was reported to be in labour. The devil 's in 't, if an bld woman is to be

flattered further, unless a man should endeavour downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me. But for the discovery of this amour, I am indebted to your friend, or your wife's friend, Mrs. Marwood.

Fain. What should provoke her to be your enemy, unless she has made you advances, which you have slighted? Women do not easily forgive omissions of that nature.

Mira. She was always civil to me, till of late; I confess I am not one of those coxcombs who are apt to interpret a woman's good manners to her prejudice; and think that she who does not refuse 'em everything, can refuse 'em nothing.

Fain. You are a gallant man, Mirabell: and though you may have cruelty enough, not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity, not to be tender of her honour. Yet you speak with an indifference which seems to be affected; and confesses you are conscious of a negligence.

Mira. You pursue the argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a concern for which the lady is more indebted to you, than is your wife.

Fain. Fie, fie, friend, if you grow censorious I must leave you; —I 'll look upon the gamesters in the next room.

Mira. Who are they?

Fain. Petulant and Witwoud—(*To Betty*). Bring me some chocolate. [Exit.]

Mira. Betty, what says your clock ?

Bet. Turned of the last canonical hour, sir. [Exit.]

Mira How pertinently the jade answers me ! Ha ! almost one a clock ! [*Looking on his watch.*] Oh, y' are come—

[2]

Enter Footman

Mira. Well, is the grand affair over ? You have been something tedious.

Serv. Sir, there's such coupling at Pancras, that they stand behind one another, as 'twere in a country dance. Ours was the last couple to lead up ; and no hopes appearing of dispatch, besides, the parson growing hoarse, we were afraid his lungs would have failed before it came to our turn ; so we drove round to Duke's Place ; and there they were riveted in a trice.

Mira. So, so, you are sure they are married.

Serv. Married and bedded, sir : I am witness.

Mira. Have you the certificate ?

Serv. Here it is, sir.

Mira. Has the tailor brought Waitwell's clothes home, and the new liveries ?

Serv. Yes, sir.

Mira. That's well. Do you go home again, d' ye hear, and adjourn the consummation till further order ; bid Waitwell shake his ears, and Dame Partlet

rustle up her feathers, and meet me at one o'clock by Rosamond's Pond ; that I may see her before she returns to her lady : and as you tender your ears be secret.

[Exit Footman.]

[3]

Re-enter Fainall and Betty

Fain. Joy of your success. Mirabell ; you look pleased.

Mira. Aye ; I have been engaged in a matter of some sort of mirth, which is not yet ripe for discovery. I am glad this is not a cabal-night. I wonder, Fainall, that you who are married, and of consequence, should be discreet, will suffer your wife to be of such a party.

Fain. Faith, I am not jealous. Besides, most who are engaged are women and relations ; and for the men, they are of a kind too contemptible to give scandal.

Mira. I am of another opinion. The greater the coxcomb, always the more the scandal : for a woman who is not a fool, can have but one reason for associating with a man who is one.

Fain. Are you jealous as often as you see Witwoud entertained by Millamant ?

Mira. Of her understanding I am, if not of her person.

Fain. You do her wrong ; for to give her her due, she has wit.

Mira. She has beauty enough to make any man think so ; and complaisance enough not to contradict him who shall tell her so.

Fain. For a passionate lover, methinks you are a man somewhat too discerning in the failings of your mistress.

Mira. And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover ; I for like her with her faults ; nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful that they become her ; and those affections which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, Fainall, she once used me with that insolence, that in revenge I took her to pieces ; sifted her, and separated her failings ; I studied' em, and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large, that I was not without hopes, one day or other, to hate her heartily ; to which end I so used myself to think of 'em, that at length, contrary to my design and expectation, they gave me every hour less and less disturbance ; till in a few days it became habitual to me, to remember 'em without being displeased. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own frailties ; and in all probability in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well.

Fain. Marry her, marry her ; be half as well acquainted with her charms, as you are with her defects, and my life on 't, you are your own man again.

Mira. Say you so ?

Fain. Aye, aye, I have experience : I have a wife, and so

[4]

Enter Messenger

Mess. Is one Squire Witwoud here?

Bet. Yes; what's your business?

Mess. I have a letter for him, from his brother, Sir Wilful, which I am charged to deliver into his own hands.

Bet. He's in the next room, friend—that way.

[5]

[Exit Messenger.]

Mira. What, is the chief of that noble family in town, Sir Wilful Witwoud?

Fain. He is expected to-day. Do you know him?

Mira. I have seen him, he promises to be an extraordinary person; I think you have the honour to be related to him.

Fain. Yes; he is half-brother to this Witwoud by a former wife, who was sister to my Lady Wishfort, my wife's mother. If you marry Millamant, you must call cousins too.

Mira. I had rather be his relation than his acquaintance.

Fain. He comes to town in order to equip himself for travel.

Mira. For travel! Why the man that I mean is above forty.

Fain. No matter for that; 'tis for the honour of England, that all Europe should know we have blockheads of all ages.

Mira. I wonder there is not an act of parliament to save the credit of the nation, and prohibit the exportation of fools.

Fain. By no means, 'tis better as 'tis ; 'tis better to trade with a little loss, than to be quite eaten up, with being overstocked.

Mira. Pray, are the follies of this knight-errant, and those of the squire his brother, anything related ?

Fain. Not at all : Witwoud grows by the knight, like a medlar grafted on a crab. One will melt in your mouth ; and t' other set your teeth on edge ; one is all pulp, and the other all core.

Mira. So one will be rotten before he be ripe, and the other will be rotten without ever being ripe at all.

Fain. Sir Wilful is an odd mixture of bashfulness and obstinacy.—But when he's drunk, he's as loving as the monster in the *Tempest*; and much after the same manner. To give t' other his due, he has something of good nature, and does not always want wit.

Mira. Not always ; but as often as his memory fails him, and his commonplace of comparison. He is a fool with a good memory, and some few scraps of other folks' wit. He is one whose conversation can never be approved, yet it is now and then to be endured. He has indeed one good quality, he is not exceptions : for he so passionately affects the reputation of understanding raillery, that he will construe an affront into a jest ; and call downright rudeness and ill language, satire and fire.

Fain. If you have a mind to finish his picture, you have an opportunity to do it at full length. Behold the original.

[6]

Enter Witwoud

Wit. Afford me your compassion, my dears ; pity me, Fainall, Mirabell, pity me.

Mira. I do from my soul.

Fain. Why, what's the matter ?

Wit. No letters for me, Betty ?

Bet. Did not a messenger bring you onc but now, sir ?

Wit. Ay, but no other ?

Bet. No, sir.

Wit. That's hard, that's very hard ;—a messenger, a mule, a beast of burden, he has brought me a letter from the fool my brother, as heavy as a panegyric in a funeral sermon, or a copy of commendatory verses from one poet to another. And what's worse, 'tis as sure a forerunner of the author, as an epistle dedicatory.

Mira. A fool, and your brother, Witwoud !

Wit. Aye, aye, my half-brother. My half-brother he is, no nearer upon honour.

Mira. Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

Wit. Good, good, Mirabell, *le drole* ! Good, good, hang him, don't let's talk of him. Fainall, how does your lady ? Gad ! I say anything in the world to get this fellow out of my head. I beg pardon that I should ask a man of pleasure, and the town, a question at once so

foreign and domestic. But I talk like an old maid at a marriage, I don't know what I say but she's the best woman in the world.

Fain. 'Tis well you don't know what you say, or else your commendation would go near to make me either vain or jealous.

Wit. No man in town lives well with a wife but Fainall. Your judgment, Mirabell ?

Mira. You had better step and ask his wife, if you would be credibly informed.

Wit. Mirábell.

Mira. Aye ?

Wit. My dear, I ask ten thousand pardons.—Gad I have forgot what I was going to say to you.

Mira. I thank you heartily, heartily.

Wit. No ; but prithee excuse me. My memory is such a memory.

Mira. Have a care of such apologies, Witwoud ; for I never knew a fool but he affected to complain, either of the spleen or his memory.

Fain. What have you done with Petulant ?

Wit. He 's reckoning his money ; my money it was—I have no luck to-day.

Fain. You may allow him to win of you at play, for you are sure to be too hard for him at repartee : since you monopolize the wit that is between you, the fortune must be his of course.

Mira. I don't find that Petulant confesses the superiority of wit to be your talent, Witwoud.

Wit. Come, come, you are malicious now, and would breed debates. Petulant 's my friend, and a very honest fellow, and a very pretty fellow, and has a smattering, faith and troth a pretty deal of an odd sort of a small wit. Nay, I 'll do him justice. I'm his friend, I won't wrong him. And if he had any judgment in the world, he would not be altogether contemptible. Come, come, don't detract from the merits of my friend.

Fain. You don't take your friend to be over nicely bred ?

Wit. No, no, hang him, the rogue has no manners at all, that I must own—no more breeding than a bum-bailey, that I grant you,—'tis pity ; the fellow has fire and life.

Mira. What, courage ?

Wit. Hum, faith, I don't know as to that ; I can't say as to that. Yes, faith, in a controversy he 'll contradict anybody.

Mira. Though 'twere a man whom he feared, or a woman whom he loved.

Wit. Well, well, he does not always think before he speaks. We have all our failings ; you are too hard upon him, you are, faith. Let me excuse him,—I can defend most of his faults, except one or two ; one he has, that 's the truth on 't, if he were my brother, I could not acquit him—that indeed I could wish were otherwise.

Mira. Aye marry, what 's that, Witwoud ?

Wit. O pardon me—expose the infirmities of my friend.
No, my dear, excuse me there.

Fain. What I warrant he 's unsincere, or 'tis some such
trifle.

Wit. No, no, what if he be ? 'Tis no matter for that,
his wit will excuse that : a wit should no more be
sincere, than a woman constant ; one argues a decay
of parts, as t' other of beauty.

Mira. Maybe you think him too positive ?

Wit. No, no, his being positive is an incentive to argument,
and keeps up conversation.

Fain. Too illiterate.

Wit. That ! that 's his happiness—his want of learning
gives him the more opportunities to show his natural
parts.

Mira. He wants words.

Wit. Aye ; but I like him for that now ; for his want of
words gives me the pleasure very often to explain his
meaning.

Fain. He 's impudent.

Wit. No, that 's not it.

Mira. Vain.

Wit. No.

Mira. What, he speaks unseasonable truths sometimes,
because he has not wit enough to invent an
evasion.

Wit. Truths ! Ha, ha ha ! No, no, since you will have it,—I mean he never speaks truth at all,—that's all. He will lie like a chambermaid, or a woman of quality's porter. Now that is a fault.

[7]

Enter Coachman

Coach. Is master Petulant here, mistress ?

Bet. Yes.

Coach. Three gentlewomen in a coach would speak with him.

Fain. O brave Petulant, three !

Bet. I'll tell him.

Coach. You must bring two dishes of chocolate and a glass of cinnamon water.

[Exeunt Coachman and Betty.]

[8]

Wit. That should be for two fasting strumpets, and a bawd troubled with wind. Now you may know what the three are.

Mira. You are very free with your friend's acquaintance.

Wit. Aye, aye : friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting ; but to tell you a secret, these are trulls whom he allows coach-hire, and something more by the week, to call on him once a day at public places.

Mira. How !

Wit. You shall see he won't go to 'em because there's no more company here to take notice of him. Why this is nothing to what he used to do. Before

he found out this way, I have known him call for himself—

Fain. Call for himself ? What dost thou mean ?

Wit. Mean, why he would slip you out of this chocolate-house, just when you had been talking to him—as soon as your back was turned—whip he was gone ;—then trip to his lodging, clap on a hood and scarf, and a mask, slap into a hackney-coach, and drive hither to the door again in a trice ; where he would send in for himself, that I mean, call for himself, wait for himself, nay and what's more, not finding himself, sometimes leave a letter for himself.

Mira. I confess this is something extraordinary—I believe he waits for himself now, he is so long a coming. Oh, I ask his pardon.

[9] *Enter Petulant and Betty*

Bet. Sir, the coach stays.

Pet. Well, well ; I come.—'Sbud a man had as good be a professed midwife, as a professed whoremaster, at this rate ; to be knocked up and raised at all hours, and in all places. Pox on 'em, I won't come. D' ye hear, tell 'em I won't come. Let 'em snivel and cry their hearts out.

Fain. You are very cruel, Petulant.

Pet. All 's one, let it pass—I have a humour to be cruel.

Mira. I hope they are not persons of condition that you use at this rate.

Pet. Condition, condition 's a dried fig, if I am not in humour. By this hand, if they were your—a—a—your what-dee-call-'ems themselves, they must wait or rub off, if I want appetite.

Mira. What-dee-call-'ems ? What are they, Witwoud ?

Wit. Empresses, my dear.—By your what-dee-call-'ems he means sultana queens.

Pet. Aye, Roxolanas.

Mira. Cry you mercy.

Fain. Witwoud says they are—

Pet. What does he say th' are ?

Wit. I ? fine ladies I say.

Pet. Pass on, Witwoud. Harkee, by this light his relations—two co-heiresses his cousins, and an old aunt, who loves cater-wauling better than a conventicle.

Wit. Ha, ha, ha ! I had a mind to see how the rogue would come off. Ha, ha, ha ! Gad, I can't be angry with him, if he had said they were my mother and my sisters.

Mira. No !

Wit. No ; the rogue's wit and readiness of invention charm me, dear Petulant.

Bet. They are gone, sir, in great anger.

Pet. Enough, let 'em trundle. Anger helps complexion, saves paint.

Fain. This continence is all dissembled ; this is in order to have something to brag of the next time, he makes

court to Millamant, and swear he has abandoned the whole sex for her sake.

Mira. Have you not left off your impudent pretensions there yet ? I shall cut your throat, some time or other, Petulant, about that business.

Pet. Aye, aye, let that pass—there are other throats to be cut.

Mira. Meaning mine, sir ?

Pet. Not I—I mean nobody—I know nothing. But there are uncles and nephews in the world—and they may be rivals.—What then ? All 's one for that.—

Mira. How ! Harkee, Petulant, come hither. Explain, or I shall call your interpreter.

Pet. Explain ? I know nothing.—Why, you have an uncle, have you not, lately come to town, and lodges by my Lady Wishfort's ?

Mira. True.

Pet. Why that 's enough—you and he are not friends ; and if he should marry and have a child, you may be disinherited, ha ?

Mira. Where hast thou stumbled upon all this truth ?

Pet. All 's one for that : why then say I know something.

Mira. Come, thou art an honest fellow, Petulant, and shalt make love to my mistress, thou shalt, faith. What hast thou heard of my uncle ?

Pet. I ? nothing I. If throats are to be cut, let swords clash ; snug's the word, I shrug and am silent.

Mira. Oh raillery, raillery. Come, I know thou art in the women's secrets. What, you 're a cabalist, I know you stayed at Millamant's last night, after I went. Was there any mention made of my uncle or me ? Tell me ; if thou hadst but good nature equal to thy wit, Petulant, Tony Witwoud, who is now thy competitor in fame, would show as dim by thee as a dead whiting's eye by a pearl of Orient ; he would no more be seen by thee, than Mercury is by the sun. Come, I 'm sure thou won't tell me.

Pet. If I do, will you grant me commonsense then, for the future ?

Mira. Faith, I 'll do what I can for thee, and I 'll pray that Heaven may grant it thee in the meantime.

Pet. Well, harkee.

[*Mirabell and Petulant whisper apart*

Fain. Petulant and you both will find Mirabell as warm a rival as a lover.

Wit. Pshaw, pshaw, that she laughs at Petulant is plain. And for my part—but that it is almost a fashion to admire her, I should—harkee—to tell you a secret, but let it go no further—between friends, I shall never break my heart for her.

Fain. How !

Wit. She 's handsome ; but she 's a sort of an uncertain woman.

Fain. I thought you had died for her.

Wit. Umph—no—

Fain. She has wit.

Wit. 'Tis what she will hardly allow anybody else.—Now, demme; I should hate that, if she were as handsome as Cleopatra. Mirabell is not so sure of her as he thinks for.

Fain. Why do you think so ?

Wit. We stayed pretty late there last night; and heard something of an uncle to Mirabell, who is lately come to town, and is between him and the best part of his estate; Mirabell and he are at some distance, as my Lady Wishfort has been told; and you know she hates Mirabell, worse than a Quaker hates a parrot, or than a fishmonger hates a hard frost. Whether this uncle has seen Mrs. Millamant or not, I cannot say; but there were items of such a treaty being in embryo; and if it should come to life, poor Mirabell would be in some sort unfortunately fobbed i' faith.

Fain. 'Tis impossible Millamant should hearken to it.

Wit. Faith, my dear, I can't tell; she 's a woman and a kind of a humorist.

[Fainall and Witwoud whisper apart]

Mira. And this is the sum of what you could collect last night ?

Pet. The quintessence. Maybe Witwould knows more, he stayed longer. Besides they never mind him; they say anything before him.

Mira. I thought you had been the greatest favourite.

Pet. Aye, *tete-a-tete*; but not in public, because I make remarks.

Mira. You do ?

Pet. Aye, aye, pox I 'm malicious, man. Now he 's soft, you know, they are not in awe of him.—The fellow 's well bred, he 's what you call a—what-d'ye-call-'em. A fine gentleman, but he 's silly withal.

Mira. I thank you, I know as much as my curiosity requires.

(*Loudly*) Fainall, are you for the Mall ?

Fain. Aye, I 'll take a turn before dinner.

Wit. Aye, we 'll all walk in the Park, the ladies talked of being there.

Mira. I thought you were obliged to watch for your brother Sir Wilful's arrival.

Wit. No, no, he comes to his aunt's, my Lady Wishfort; pox on him. I shall be troubled with him too ; what shall I do with the fool ?

Pet. Beg him for his estate ; that I may beg you afterwards ; and so have but one trouble with you both.

Wit. O rare Petulent ; thou art as quick as fire in a frosty morning ; thou shalt to the Mall with us ; and we 'll be very severe.

Pet. Enough, I 'm in a humour to be severe.

Mira. Are you ? Pray then walk by yourselves. Let not us be accessory to your putting the ladies out of

countenance, with your senseless ribaldry ; which you roar out aloud as often as they pass by you ; and when you have made a handsome woman blush, then you think you have been severe.

Pet. What, what ? Then let 'em either show their innocence by not understanding what they hear, or else show their discretion by not hearing what they would not be thought to understand.

Mira. But hast not thou then sense enough to know that thou ought'st to be most ashamed of thyself, when thou hast put another out of countenance ?

Pet. Not I, by this hand—I always take blushing either for a sign of guilt, or ill breeding.

Mira. I confess you ought to think so. You are in the right, that you may plead the error of your judgment in defence of your practice.

Where modesty's ill manners, 'tis but fit
That impudence and malice pass for wit.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT TWO

St. James's Park

Enter Mrs. Fainall and Marwood

Mrs. Fain. Aye, aye, dear Marwood, if we will be happy, we must find the means in ourselves, and among ourselves. Men are ever in extremes ; either doting, or averse. While they are lovers, if they have fire and sense, their jealousies are insupportable : and when they cease to love (we ought to think at least) they loathe ; they look upon us with horror and distaste ; they meet us like the ghosts of what we were, and as from such, fly from us.

Mrs. Mar. True, 'tis an unhappy circumstance of life, that love should ever die before us : and that the man so often should outlive the lover. But say what you will, 'tis better to be left, than never to have been loved. To pass our youth in dull indifference, to refuse the sweets of life because they once must leave us, is as preposterous as to wish to have been born old, because we one day must be old. For my part, my youth may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession,

Mrs. Fain. Then it seems you dissemble an aversion to mankind, only in compliance to my mother's humour.

Mrs. Mar. Certainly. To be free ; I have no taste of those insipid dry discourses, with which our sex of force must entertain themselves, apart from men. We may affect endearments to each other, profess eternal friendships, and seem to dote like lovers ; but 'tis not in our natures long to persevere. Love will resume his empire in our breasts, and every heart, or soon or late, receive and readmit him as its lawful tyrant.

Mrs. Fain. Bless me, how have I been deceived ! Why, you profess a libertine.

Mrs. Mar. You see my friendship by my freedom. Come, be as sincere, acknowledge that your sentiments agree with mine.

Mrs. Fain. Never.

Mrs. Mar. You hate mankind ?

Mrs. Fain. Heartily, inveterately.

Mrs. Mar. Your husband ?

**Mrs. Fain.* Most transcendently ; aye, though I say it, meritoriously.

Mrs. Mar. Give me your hand upon it.

Mrs. Fain. There.

Mrs. Mar. I join with you : what I have said has been to try you.

Mrs. Fain. Is it possible ? Dost thou hate those vipers, men ?

Mrs. Mar. I have done hating 'em, and am now come to despise 'em ; the next thing I have to do, is eternally to forget 'em.

Mrs. Fain. There spoke the spirit of an Amazon a Penthesilea.

Mrs. Mar. And yet I am thinking sometimes to carry my aversion further.

Mrs. Fain. How ?

Mrs. Mar. Faith, by marrying ; if I could but find one that loved me very well, and would be thoroughly sensible of ill usage, I think I should do myself the violence of undergoing the ceremony.

Mrs. Fain. You would not make him a cuckold ?

Mrs. Mar. No ; but I 'd make him believe I did, and that 's as bad.

Mrs. Fain. Why had not you as good do it ?

Mrs. Mar. Oh, if he should ever discover it, he would then know the worst, and be out of his pain ; but I would have him ever to continue upon the rack of fear and jealousy.

Mrs. Fain. Ingenious mischief ! Would thou wert married to Mirabell.

Mrs. Mar. Would I were.

Mrs. Fain. You change colour.

Mrs. Mar. Because I hate him.

Mrs. Fain. So do I ; but I can hear him named. But what reason have you to hate him in particular ?

Mrs. Mar. I never loved him ; he is, and always was, insufferably proud.

Mrs. Fain. By the reason you give for your aversion, one would think it dissembled ; for you have laid a fault to his charge of which his enemies must acquit him.

Mrs. Mar. Oh, then it seems you are one of his favourable enemies. Methinks you look a little pale, and now you flush again.

Mrs. Fain. Do I ? I think I am a little sick o' the sudden.

Mrs. Mar. What ails you ?

Mrs. Fain. My husband. Don't you see him ? He turned short upon me unawares, and had almost overcome me.

Enter Fainall and Mirabell

Mrs. Mar Ha, ha ha ! he comes opportunely for you.

Mrs. Fain. For you, for he has brought Mirabell with him.

Fain. My dear.

Mrs. Fain. My soul.

Fain. You don't look well to-day, child.

Mrs. Fain. D' ye think so ?

Mira. He is the only man that does, madam.

Mrs. Fain. The only man that would tell me so at least ; and the only man from whom I could hear it without mortification.

Fain. Oh, my dear, I am satisfied of your tenderness ; I know you cannot resent anything from me ; especially what is an effect of my concern.

Mrs. Fain. Mr. Mirabell, my mother interrupted you in a pleasant relation last night : I would fain hear it out.

Mira. The persons concerned in that affair have yet a tolerable reputation.—I am afraid Mr. Fainall will be censorious.

Mrs. Fain. He has a humour more prevailing than his curiosity, and will willingly dispense with the hearing of one scandalous story, to avoid giving an occasion to make another by being seen to walk with his wife. This way, Mr. Mirabell, and I dare promise you will oblige us both.

[*Exeunt Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell.*]

Fain. Excellent creature ! Well, sure if I should live to be rid of my wife, I should be a miserable man.

Mrs. Mar. Ay !

Fain. For having only that one hope, the accomplishment of it, of consequence, must put an end to all my hopes ; and what-a wretch is he who must survive his hopes ! Nothing remains when that day comes, but to sit down and weep like Alexander, when he wanted other worlds to conquer.

Mrs. Mar. Will you not follow 'em ?

Fain. Faith, I think not.

Mrs. Mar. Pray let us ; I have a reason.

Fain. You are not jealous ?

Mrs. Mar. Of whom ?

Fain. Of Mirabell.

Mrs. Mar. If I am, is it inconsistent with my love to you that I am tender of your honour ?

Fain. You would intimate then, as if there were a fellow-feeling between my wife and him.

Mrs. Mar. I think she does not hate him to that degree she would be thought.

Fuin. But he, I fear, is too insensible.

Mrs. Mar. It may be you are deceived.

Fain. It may be so. I do now begin to apprehend it.

Mrs. Mar. What ?

Fain. That I have been deceived, madam, and you are false.

Mrs. Mar. That I am false ! What mean you ?

Fain. To let you know I see through all your little arts. Come, you both love him ; and both have equally dissembled your aversion. Your mutual jealousies of one another have made you clash till you have both struck fire. I have seen the warm confession reddening on your cheeks, and sparkling from your eyes.

Mrs. Mar. You do me wrong.

Fain. I do not.—'Twas for my ease to oversee and wilfully neglect the gross advances made him by my wife ; that by permitting her to be engaged, I might continue unsuspected in my pleasures ; and take you oftener to my arms in full security. But could you think, because the nodding husband would not wake, that e'er the watchful lover slept ?

Mrs. Mar. And wherewithal can you reproach me ?

Fain. With infidelity, with loving another, with love of Mirabell.

Mrs. Mar. 'Tis false. I challenge you to show an instance that can confirm your groundless accusation. I hate him.

Fain. And wherefore do you hate him ? He is insensible, and your resentment follows his neglect. An instance ! The injuries you have done him are a proof : your interposing in his love. What cause had you to make discoveries of his pretended passion ? To undeceive the credulous aunt, and be the officious obstacle of his match with Millamant ?

Mrs. Mar. My obligations to my lady urged me ; I had professed a friendship to her ; and could not see her easy nature so abused by that dissembler.

Fain. What, was it conscience then ? Professed a friendship ! O the pious friendships of the female sex !

Mrs. Mar. More tender more sincere, and more enduring, than all the vain and empty vows of men, whether professing love to us or mutual faith to one another.

Fain. He, ha, ha ! you are my wife's friend too

Mrs. Mar. Shame and ingratitude ! Do you reproach me ? You, you upbraid me ! Have I been false to her, through strict fidelity to you, and sacrificed my friendship to keep my love inviolate ? And have you the baseness to charge me with the guilt, unmindful of the merit ! To you it should be meritorious, that I have been vicious : and do you

reflect that guilt upon me, which should lie buried in your bosom ?

Fain. You misinterpret my reproof. I meant but to remind you of the slight account you once could make of strictest ties, when set in competition with your love to me.

Mrs. Mar. 'Tis false, you urged it with deliberate malice.—
'Twas spoke in scorn, and I never will forgive it.

Fain. Your guilt, not your resentment, begets your age.
If yet you loved, you could forgive a jealousy :
but you are stung to find you are discovered.

Mrs. Mar. It shall be all discovered. You too shall be discovered ; be sure you shall. I can but be exposed—if I do it myself I shall prevent your baseness.

Fain. Why, what will you do ? .

Mrs. Mar. Disclose it to your wife; own what has passed between us.

Fain. Frenzy !

Mrs. Mar. By all my wrongs I 'll do 't—I 'll publish to the world the injuries you have done me, both in my fame and fortune. With both I trusted you, you bankrupt in honour, as indigent of wealth.

Fain. Your fame I have preserved. Your fortune has been bestowed as the prodigality of your love would have it, in pleasures which we both have shared. Yet had not you been false, I had ere this repaid it.—'Tis true, had you permitted Mirabell with Millamant to have stolen their marriage, my lady had been incensed beyond all

means of reconciliation : Millamant had fors>ited the moiety of her fortune ; which then would have descended to my wife ;—and wherefore did I marry, but to make lawful prize of a rich widow's wealth, and squander it on love and you ?

Mrs. Mar. Deceit and frivolous pretence.

Fain. Death, am I not married ? What's pretence ? Am I not imprisoned, fettered ? Have I not a wife ? Nay, a wife that was a widow, a young widow, a handsome widow ; and would be again a widow, but that I have a heart of proof, and something of a constitution to bustle through the ways of wedlock and this world. Will you yet be reconciled to truth and me ?

Mrs. Mar. Impossible. Truth and you are inconsistent—I hate you, and shall for ever.

Fain. For loving you ?

Mrs. Mar. I loathe the name of love after such usage ; and next to the guilt with which you would asperse me, I scorn you most. Farewell.

Fain. Nay, we must not part thus.

Mrs. Mar. Let me go.

Fain. Come, I 'm sorry.

Mrs. Mar. I care not—let me go—break my hands, do—I 'd leave 'em to get loose.

Fain. I would not hurt you for the world. Have I no other hold to keep you here ?

Mrs. Mar. Well, I have deserved it all.

Fain. You know I love you.

Mrs. Mar. Poor dissembling !—Oh, that—Well, it is not yet—

Fain. What ? What is it not ? What is it not yet ?
It is not yet too late—

Mrs. Mar. No, it is not yet too late—I have that comfort.

Fain. It is, to love another.

Mrs. Mar. But not to loathe, detest, abhor mankind, myself
and the whole treacherous world.

Fain. Nay, this is extravagance. Come, I ask your pardon
—no tears—I was to blame, I could not love you
and be easy in my doubt.—Pray forbear—I believe
you ; I 'm convinced I 've done you wrong ; and
any way, every way will make amends ;—I 'll hate
my wife yet more, damn her, I 'll part with her, rob
her of all she's worth, and we 'll retire somewhere,
anywhere, to another world. I 'll marry thee.—
Be pacified—'Sdeath, they come, hide your face,
your tears—you have a mask, wear it a moment.
This way, this way, be persuaded. [Exeunt.

Re-enter Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall

Mrs. Fain. They are here yet.

Mira. They are turning into the other walk.

Mrs. Fain. While I only hated my husband, I could bear to
see him ; but since I have despised him, he's too
offensive.

Mira. Oh, you should hate with prudence.

Mrs. Fain. Yes, for I have loved with indiscretion.

Mira. You should have just so much disgust for your
husband as may be sufficient to make you relish
your lover.

Mrs. Fain. You have been the cause that I have loved without bounds, and would you set limits to that aversion, of which you have been the occasion ? Why did you make me marry this man ?

Mira. Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions ? To save that idol reputation. If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence, of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father's name with credit, but on a husband ? I knew Fainall to be a man lavish of his morals, an interested and professing friend, a false and a designing lover ; yet one whose wit and outward fair behaviour have gained a reputation with the town, enough to make that woman stand excused, who has suffered herself to be won by his addresses. A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion ; a worse had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him, you know your remedy.

Mrs. Fain. I ought to stand in some degree of credit with you, Mirabell.

Mira. In justice to you, I have made you privy to my whole design, and put it in your power to ruin or advance my fortune.

Mrs. Fain. Whom have you instructed to represent your pretended uncle ?

Mira. Waitwell, my servant.

Mrs. Fain. He is an humble servant to Foible, my mother's woman, and may win her to your interest.

Mira. Care is taken for that—she is won and worn by this time. They were married this morning.

Mrs. Fain. Who ?

Mira. Waitwell and Foible. I would not tempt my servant to betray me by trusting him too far. If your mother, in hopes to ruin me, should consent to marry my pretended uncle, he might, like Mosca in the *Fox*, stand upon terms ; so I made him sure beforehand.

Mrs. Fain. So, if my poor mother is caught in a contract, you will discover the imposture betimes : and release her by producing a certificate of her gallant's former marriage.

Mira. Yes, upon condition that she consent to my marriage with her niece, and surrender the moiety of her fortune in her possession.

Mrs. Fain. She talked last night of endeavouring at a match between Millamant and your uncle.

Mira. That was by Foible's direction, and my instruction, that she might seem to carry it more privately.

Mrs. Fain. Well, I have an opinion of your success ; for I believe my lady will do anything to get an husband ; and when she has this, which you have provided for her, I suppose she will submit to anything to get rid of him.

Mira. Yes, I think the good lady would marry anything that resembled a man, though 'twere no more than what a butler could pinch out of a napkin.

Mrs. Fain. Female frailty ! We must all come to it, if we live to be old, and feel the craving of a false appetite when the true is decayed.

Mira. An old woman's appetite is depravcd like that of a girl—'tis the green-sickness of a second child-hood ; and like the faint offer of a later spring, serves but to usher in the fall ; and withers in an affected bloom.

Mrs. Fain. Here's your mistress.

Enter Mrs. Millamant, Witwout, and Mincing

Mira. Here she comes i' faith full sail, with her fan spread and streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders—ha, no, I cry her mercy.

Mrs. Fain. I see but one poor empty sculler ; and he tows her woman after him.

Mira. You seem to be unattended, madam. You used to have the *beau monde* throng after you ; and a flock of gay fine perukes hovering round you.

Wit. Like moths about a candle—I had like to have lost my comparison for want of breath.

Milla. Oh, I have denied myself airs to-day. I have walked as fast through the crowd—

Wit. As a favourite just disgraced ; and with as few followers.

Milla. Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes : for I am as sick of 'em—

Wit. As a physician of a good air—I cannot help it, madam, though 'tis against myself.

Milla. Yet again ! Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

- Wit.* Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a screen before a great fire. I confess I do blaze to-day, I am too bright.
- Mrs. Fain.* But, dear Millamant, why were you so long?
- Milla.* Long! Lord, have I not made violent haste? I have asked every living thing I met for you: I have enquired after you, as after a new fashion.
- Wit.* Madam, truce with your similitudes—No, you met her husband, and did not ask him for her.
- Mira.* By your leave, Witwoud, that were like enquiring after an old fashion, to ask a husband for his wife.
- Wit.* Hum, a hit, a hit, a palpable hit, I confess it.
- Mrs. Fain.* You were dressed before I came abroad.
- Milla.* Ay, that's true—Oh, but then I had—Mincing, what had I? Why was I so long?
- Minc.* Oh, mem, your la'ship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.
- Milla.* Oh, ay, letters—I had letters—I am persecuted with letters—I hate letters—no body knows how to write letters; and yet one has 'em, one does not know why—they serve one to pin up one's hair.
- Wit.* Is that the way? Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all your letters? I find I must keep copies.
- Milla.* Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud. I never pin up my hair with prose, I 'll think I tried once, Mincing.
- Minc.* Oh, mem, I shall never forget it.
- Milla.* Ay, poor Mincing tift and tift all the morning.

- Minc.* 'Till I had the cramp in my fingers, I vow, mem.
And all to no purpose. But when your la'ship
pins it up with poetry, it sits so pleasant the next
day as anything and is so pure and so crips.
- Wit.* Indeed, so crips ?
- Minc.* You 're such a critic, Mr. Witwoud.
- Milla.* Mirabell, did you take exceptions last night ? Oh,
ay, and went away.—Now I think on 't I 'm
angry.—No, now I think on 't I 'm pleased—for
I believe I gave you some pain.
- Mira.* Does that please you ?
- Milla.* Infinitely ; I love to give pain.
- Mira.* You would affect a cruelty which is not in your
nature ; your true vanity is in the power of
pleasing.
- Milla.* Oh, I ask your pardon for that—one's cruelty is
one's power, and when one parts with one's
cruelty, one parts with one's power ; and when
one has parted with that, I fancy one 's old and
ugly.
- Mira.* Ay, ay. suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of
your power, to destroy your lover—and then how
vain, how lost a thing you 'll be ! Nay, 'tis true :
you are no longer handsome when you 've lost
your lover ; your beauty dies upon the instant ; for
beauty is the lover's gift ; 'tis he bestows your
charms. Your glass is all a cheat. The ugly and
the old, whom the looking-glass mortifies, yet after
commendation can be flattered by it, and discover

beauties in it : for that reflects our praises, rather than your face.

Milla. Oh, the vanity of these men ! Fainall, d' ye hear him ? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome ! Now you must know they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty is the lover's gift—Lord, what is a lover, that it can give ? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases ; and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases : and then if one pleases one makes more.

Wit. Very pretty. Why, you make no more of making of lovers, madam, than of making so many card-matches.

Milla. One no more owes one's beauty to a lover, than one's wit to an echo ; they can but reflect what we look and say ; vain empty things if we are silent or unseen, and want a being.

Mira. Yet, to those two vain empty things, you owe the two greatest pleasures of your life.

Milla. How so ?

Mira. To your lover you owe the pleasure of hearing yourselves praised ; and to an echo the pleasure of hearing yourselves talk.

Wit. But I know a lady that loves talking so incessantly, she won't give an echo fair play ; she has that everlasting rotation of tongue, that an echo must wait 'till she dies, before it can catch her last words.

Milla. Oh, fiction ; Fainall, let us leave these men.

Mira. Draw off Witwoud. [Aside to Mrs. Fainall]

Mrs. Fain. Immediately; I have a word or two for Mr. Witwoud.

[*Exeunt Mrs. Fainall and Witwoud*]

Mira. I would beg a little private audience too—you had the tyranny to deny me last night; though you knew I came to impart a secret to you that concerned my love.

Milla. You say I was engaged.

Mira. Unkind. You had the leisure to entertain a herd of fools; things who visit you from their excessive idleness; bestowing on your easiness that time, which is the encumbrance of their lives. How can you find delight in such society? It is impossible they should admire you, they are not capable: or if they were, it should be to you as a mortification; for sure to please a fool is some degree of folly.

Milla. I please myself.—Besides, sometimes to converse with fools is for my health.

Mira. Your health! Is there a worse disease than the conversation of fools?

Milla. Yes, the vapours; fools are physic for it, next to *assafoetida*.

Mira. You are not in a course of fools?

Milla. Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive freedom, you 'll displease me.—I think I must resolve, after all, not to have you—we shan't agree.

Mira. Not in our physic it may be.

- Milla.* And yet our distemper in all likelihood will be the same ; for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded, nor instructed ; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults—I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you, Mirabell.—I'm resolved—I think you may go. Ha, ha, ha ! What would you give, that you could help loving me.
- Mira.* I would give something that you did not know I could not help it.
- Milla.* Come, don't look grave then. Well, what do you say to me ?
- Mira.* I say that a man may as soon make a friend by his wit, or a fortune by his honesty, as win a woman with plain-dealing and sincerity.
- Milla.* Sententious Mirabell ! prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Soloman at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry hanging.
- Mira.* You are merry madam, but I would persuade you for a moment to be serious.
- Milla.* What, with that face ? No, if you keep your countenance, 'tis impossible I should hold mine. Well, after all, there is something very moving in a lovesick face. Ha, ha, ha ! Well, I won't laugh, don't be peevish. Heigho ! Now I'll be melancholy, as melancholy as a watch-light. Well, Mirabell, if ever you will win me, woo me now. Nay, if you are so tedious, fare you well. I see they are walking away.

Mira. Can you not find in the variety of your disposition one moment—

Milla. To hear you tell me Foible 's married, and your plot like to speed ? No.

Mira. But how you came to know it—

Milla. Without the help of the devil, you can't imagine ; unless she would tell me herself. Which of the two it may have been, I will leave you to consider ; and when you have done thinking of that, think, of me.

[*Exeunt Millamant and Mincing*

Mira. I have something more. Gone !—Think of you ! To think of a whirlwind, though 'twere in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation ; a very tranquillity of mind and mansion. A fellow that lives in windmill has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman. There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which they are not turned ; and by one as well as another ; for motion not method is their occupation. To know this, and yet continue to be in love, is to be made wise from the dictates of reason, and yet persevere to play the fool by the force of instinct.—Oh, here come my pair of turtles,—what, billing so sweetly ! Is not Valentine's Day over with you yet ?

[*Enter Waitwell and Foible*

Mira. Sirrah, Waitwell, why, sure you think you were married for your own recreation, and not for my conveniency.

- Wait.* Your pardon, sir. With submission, we have indeed been solacing in lawful delights ; but still with an eye to business, sir. I have instructed her as well as I could. If she can take your directions as readily as my instructions, sir, your affairs are in a prosperous way.
- Mira* Give you joy, Mrs. Foible.
- Foib.* Alas, sir, I'm so ashamed. I'm afraid my lady has been in a thousand inquietudes for me. But I protest, sir ! I made as much haste as I could.
- Wait.* That she did indeed, sir. It was my fault that she did not make more.
- Mira.* That I believe.
- Foib.* But I told my lady as you instructed me, sir, that I had a prospect of seeing Sir Rowland your uncle ; and that I would put her ladyship's picture in my pocket to show him ; which I'll be sure to say has made him so enamoured of her beauty, that he burns with impatience to lie at her ladyship's feet and worship the original.
- Mira.* Excellent Foible ! Matrimony has made you eloquent in love.
- Wait.* I think she has profited, sir. I think so.
- Foib.* You have seen Madam Millamant, sir ?
- Mira.* Yes.
- Foib.* I told her, sir, because I did not know that you might find an opportunity ; she had so much company last night.
- Mira.* Your diligence will merit more. In the meantime—
[Gives money]
- Foib.* O dear sir, your humble servant.

Wait. Spouse.

Mira. Stand off, sir, not a penny. Go on and prosper, Foible—the lease shall be made good and the farm stocked, if we succeed.

Foib. I don't question your generosity, sir: and you need not doubt of success. If you have no more commands, sir, I'll be gone; I'm sure my lady is at her toilet, and can't dress till I come.—O, dear, I'm sure that [*Looking out*] was Mrs. Marwood that went by in a mask; if she has seen me with you I'm sure she'll tell my lady. I'll make haste home and prevent her. Your servant, sir. Bye, Waitwell. [Exit]

Wait. Sir Rowland if you please. The jade's so pert upon her preferment she forgets herself.

Mira. Come, sir, will you endeavour to forget yourself—and transform into Sir Rowland?

Wait. Why, sir; it will be impossible I should remember myself—married, knighted and attended all in one day! 'Tis enough to make any man forget himself. The difficulty will be how to recover my acquaintance and familiarity with my former self; and fall from my transformation to a reformation into Waitwell. Nay, I shan't be quite the same Waitwell neither—for now I remember me, I'm married, and can't be my own man again.

Ay there's my grief; that's the sad change of life; o lose my title, and yet keep my wife.

[*Exeunt*

ACT THREE

A room in Lady Wishfort's house

Lady Wishfort at her toilet, Peg waiting

Lady. Merciful, no news of Foible yet ?

Peg. No, madam.

Lady. I have no more patience.—If I have not fretted myself till I am pale again, there's no veracity in me. Fetch me the red—the red, do you hear, sweet-heart ? An arrant ash colour, as I'm a person. Look you how this wench stirs ! Why dost thou not fetch me a little red ? Didst thou not hear me, mopus ?

Peg. The red ratafia does your ladyship mean, or the cherrybrandy ?

Lady. Ratafia, fool. No, fool. Not the ratafia, fool. Grant me patience ! I mean the Spanish paper, idiot, complexion, darling. Paint, paint, paint ! dost thou understand that, changeling, dangling thy hands like bobbins before thee ? Why dost thou not stir, puppet ? thou wooden thing upon wires.

Peg. Lord, madam, your ladyship is so impatient—I cannot come at the paint, madam, Mrs. Foible has locked it up, and carried the key with her.

Lady. A pox take you both—fetch me the cherry-brandy then. [Exit Peg]

Lady. I'm as pale and as faint, I look like Mrs. Qualmsick the curate's wife, that 's always breeding. Wench, 'come, come, wench, what are thou doing, sipping ? tasting ? Save thee, dost thou not know the bottle ?

Peg. Madam, I was looking for a cup.

Lady. A cup, save thee, and what a cup hast thou brought ! Dost thou take me for a fairy, to drink out of an acorn ? Why didst thou not bring thy thimble ? Hast thou ne'er a brass thimble clinking in thy pocket with a bit of nutmeg ? I warrant thee. Come, fill, fill. So—again. See who that is.—[One knocks] Set down the bottle first. Here, here, under the table.—What, wouldst thou go with the bottle in thy hand like a tapster ! As I 'm a person, this wench has lived in an inn upon the road, before she came to me, like Mariternes the Asturian in *Don Quixote*. No Foible yet ?

Peg. No, Madam, Mrs. Marwood.

Lady. Oh, Marwood, let her come in, good Marwood.

Enter Mrs. Marwood

Mrs. Mar. I 'm surprised to find your ladyship in *deshabille* at this time of day.

Lady. Foible 's a lost thing ; has been abroad since morning and never heard of since.

Mrs. Mar. I saw her but now, as I came masked through the Park, in conference with Mirabell.

Lady. With Mirabell ! You call my blood into my face, with mentioning that traitor. She durst not have the confidence. I sent her to negotiate an affair, in which if I 'm detected I 'm undone. If that wheedling villain has wrought upon Foible to detect me, I 'm ruined. Oh, my dear friend. I 'm a wretch of wretches if I 'm detected.

Mrs. Mar. Oh, madam, you cannot suspect Mrs. Foible's integrity.

Lady. Oh, he carries poison in his tongue that would corrupt integrity itself. If she has given him an opportunity, she has as good as put her integrity into his hands. Ah, dear Marwood, what's integrity to an opportunity?—Hark! I hear her. Dear friend, retire into my closet, that I may examine her with more freedom. You'll pardon me, dear friend, I can make bold with you. There are books over the chimney—Quarles and Prynne, and the *Short View of the Stage*, with Bunyan's works to entertain you.—Go, you thing, and send her in. [To Peg]

[*Exeunt Mrs. Marwood and Peg*

Enter Foible

Lady. O Foible, where hast thou been? what hast thou been doing?

Foib. Madam, I have seen the party.

Lady. But what hast thou done?

Foib. Nay, 'tis your ladyship has done, and are to do; I have only promised. But a man so enamoured—so transported! Well, if worshipping of pictures be a sin—poor Sir Rowland, I say.

Lady. The miniature has been counted like.—But hast thou not betrayed me, Foible? Hast thou not detected me to that faithless Mirabell? What hadst thou to do with him in the Park? Answer me, has he got nothing out of thee?

Foib. So, the devil has been beforehand with me, what shall I say?—Alas, madam, could I help it, if I met that confident thing? Was I in fault? If you had heard how he used me, and all upon

your ladyship's account, I 'm sure you would not suspect my fidelity. Nay, if that have been the worst I could have borne : but he had a fling at your ladyship too ; and then I could not hold : but i' faith I gave him his own.

Lady. Me ? What did the filthy fellow say ?

Foib. Oh, madam ; 'tis a shame to say what he said—with his taunts and his fleers, tossing up his nose. Humph (says he), what, you are a-hatching some plot (says he), you are so early abroad, or catering (says he), ferreting for some disbanded officer, I warrant—half-pay is but thin subsistence (says he)—well, what pension does your lady propose ? Let me see (says he)—what, she must come down pretty deep now, she 's superannuated (says he) and—

Lady. Odds my life, I 'll have him, I 'll have him murdered. I 'll have him poisoned. Where does he eat ? I 'll marry a drawer to have him poisoned in his wine. I 'll send for Robin from Locketts—immediately.

Foib. Poison him ? Poisoning 's too good for him. Starve him, madam, starve him ; marry Sir Rowland, and get him disinherited. Oh, you would bless yourself, to hear what he said.

Lady. A villain, superannuated.

Foib. Humph (says he), I hear you are laying designs against me too (says he), and Mrs. Millamant is to marry my uncle (he does not suspect a word of your ladyship) ; but (says he) I 'll fit you for that, I warrant you (says he), I 'll hamper you for that (says he), you and your old frippery too (says he), I 'll handle you—

- Lady.* Audacious villain ! handle me, would he durst—
Frippery ! old frippery ! Was there ever such a
foul-mouthed fellow ? I 'll be contracted to-night.
- Foib.* The sooner the better, madam.
- 'Lady.* Will Sir Rowland be here, sayest thou ? When,
Foible ?
- Foib.* Incontinently, madam. No new sheriff's wife
expects the return of her husband after knight-
hood, with that impatience in which Sir Rowland
burns for the dear hour of kissing your ladyship's
hand after dinner.
- Lady.* Frippery ! superannuated frippery ! I 'll frippery
the villain ; I 'll reduce him to frippery and rags : a
tatterdemalion—I hope to see him hung with tat-
ters, like a Long-Lane pent-house, or a gibbet-
thief. A slander-mouthed railler : I warrant the
spendthrift prodigal 's in debt as much as the
million lottery, or the whole court upon a birth-
day. I 'll spoil his credit with his tailor. Yes, he
shall have my niece with her fortune, he shall.
- Foib.* He ! I hope to see him lodge in Ludgate first, and
angle into Blackfriars for brass farthings, with an
old mitten.
- Lady.* Ay, dear Foible ; thank thee for that, dear Foible.
He has put me out of all patience. I shall never
recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland
with any economy of face. This wretch has fretted
me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.
- Foib.* Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly,
indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible
in the white varnish.

Lady. Let me see the glass—Cracks, sayest thou ? Why, I am arrantly flayed—I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes ; or I shall never keep up to my picture.

Foib. I warrant you, madam ; a little art once made your picture like you ; and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam.

Lady. But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come ? Or will he not fail when he does come ? Will he be importunate, Foible, and push ? For if he should not be importunate, I shall never break decorums.—I shall die with confusion, if I am forced to advance.—Oh, no, I can never advance. I shall swoon if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better bred, than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms. I won't be too coy neither, I won't give him despair. But a little scorn is alluring.

Foib. A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

Lady. Yes, but tenderness becomes me best—a sort of dyingness.—You see that picture has a sort of a—ha, Foible ? A swimmingness in the eyes. Yes, I 'll look so—my niece affects it ; but she wants features. Is Sir Rowland handsome ? Let my toilet be removed—I 'll dress above. I 'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome ? Don't answer me. I won't know : I 'll be surprized. I 'll be taken by surprize.

Foib. By storm, madam. Sir Rowland 's a brisk man.

Lady. Is he ! Oh, then he 'll importune, if he 's a brisk man. I shall save decorums if Sir Rowland importunes. I have a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums. Oh, I 'm glad he 's a brisk man. Let my things be removed, good Foible. [Exit

Enter Mrs. Fainall

Mrs. Fain. O Foible, I have been in a fright, lest I should come too late. That devil, Marwood, saw you in the Park with Mirabell, and I'm afraid will discover it to my lady.

Foib. Discover what, madam ?

Mrs. Fain. Nay, nay, put not on that strange face. I am privy to the whole design, and know that Waitwell, to whom thou wert this morning married, is to personate Mirabell's uncle, and as such, winning my lady, to involve her in those difficulties from which Mirabell only must release her, by his making his conditions to have my cousin and her fortune left to her own disposal.

Foib. Oh, dear madam, I beg your pardon. It was not my confidence in your ladyship that was deficient ; but I thought the former good correspondence between your ladyship and Mr. Mirabell might have hindered his communicating this secret.

Mrs. Fain. Dear Foible, forget that.

Foib. Oh, dear madam, Mr. Mirabell is such a sweet winning gentleman. But your ladyship is the pattern of generosity. Sweet lady, to be so good ! Mr. Mirabell cannot choose but be grateful. I find your ladyship has his heart still. Now,

madam, I can safely tell your ladyship our success, Mrs. Marwood had told my lady ; but I warrant I managed myself. I turned it all for the better. I told my lady that Mr. Mirabell railed at her. I laid horrid things to his charge, I 'll vow ; and my lady is so incensed, that she 'll be contracted to Sir Rowland to-night, she says ;—I warrant I worked her up, that he may have her for asking for, as they say of a Welsh maiden-head.

Mrs. Fain. Oh, rare Foible !

Foib. Madam, I beg your ladyship to acquaint Mr. Mirabell of his success. I would be seen as little as possible to speak to him— besides, I believe Madam Marwood watches me. She has a month's mind ; but I know Mr. Mirabell can't abide her.— [Calls] John—remoye my lady's toilet. Madam, your servant. My lady is so impatient, I fear she 'll come for me, if I stay.

Mrs. Fain. I 'll go with you up the back stairs, lest I should meet her. [Exeunt]

Enter Mrs. Marwood

Mrs. Mar. Indeed, Mrs. Engine, is it thus with you ? Are you become a go-between of this importance ? Yes, I shall watch you. Why, this wench is the *passe-partout*, a very masterkey to everybody's strong box. My friend Fainall, have you carried it so swimmingly ? I thought there was something in it ; but it seems it 's over with you. Your loathing is not from a want of appetite then, but from a surfeit. Else you could never be so cool to fall from a principal to be an assistant ; to procure

for him ! A pattern of generosity, that—I confess. Well, Mr. Fainall, you have met with your match—O man, man ! Woman, woman ! The devil 's an ass : if I were a painter, I would draw him like an idiot, a driveller with a bib and bells. Man should have his head and horns, and woman the rest of him. Poor simple friend ! Madam Marwood has a month's mind, but he can't abide her.—'Twere better for him you had not been his confessor in that affair, without you could have kept his counsel closer. I shall not prove another pattern of generosity—he has not obliged me to that with those excesses of himself ; and now I 'll have none of him. Here comes the good lady, panting ripe ; with a heart full of hope, and a head full of care, like any chemist upon the day of projection.

Enter Lady Wishfort

Lady. Oh, dear Marwood, what shall I say for this rude forgetfulness—but my dear friend is all goodness.

Mrs. Mar. No apologies, dear madam. I have been very well entertained.

Lady. As I 'm a person, I am in a very chaos to think I should so forget myself—but I have such an olio of affairs really I know not what to do. [Calls] Foible—I expect my nephew Sir Wilful every moment too :—[Calls again] Why, Foible—he means to travel for improvement.

Mrs. Mar. Methinks Sir Wilful should rather think of marrying than travelling at his years. I hear he is turned of forty.

Lady. Oh, he 's in less danger of being spoiled by his

travels—I am against my nephew's marrying too young. It will be time enough when he comes back, and has acquired discretion to choose for himself.

Mrs. Mar. Methinks Mrs. Millamant and he would make a very fit match. He may travel afterwards. 'Tis a thing very usual with young gentlemen.

Lady. I promise you I have thought on 't—and since 'tis your judgment, I 'll think on 't again, I assure you I will ; I value your judgement extremely. On my word I 'll propose it.

Enter Foible

Lady. Come, come, Foible.—I had forgot my nephew will be here before dinner —I must make haste.

Foib. Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant are come to dine with your ladyship.

Lady. Oh, dear, I can't appear till I am dressed. Dear Marwood, shall I be free with you again, and beg you to entertain 'em. I 'll make all imaginable haste. Dear friend, excuse me.

[*Exeunt Lady Wishfort and Foible*

Enter Mrs. Millamant and Mincing

Milla. Sure never anything was so unbred as that odious man.—Marwood, your servant.

Mrs. Mar. You have a colour, what's the matter.

Milla. That horrid fellow Petulant has provoked me into a flame—I have broke my fan. Mincing, lend me yours.—Is not all the powder out of my hair ?

Mrs. Mar. No. What has he done ?

Milla. Nay, he has done nothing ; he has only talked. Nay, he has said nothing neither ; but he has con-

tradicted everything that has been said. For my part, I thought Witwoud and he would have quarrelled.

Minc. I vow, mem, I thought once they would have fitt.

Milla. Well, 'tis a lamentable thing, I swear, that one has not the liberty of choosing one's acquaintance as one does one's clothes.

Mrs. Mar. If we had that liberty, we should be as weary of one set of acquaintance, though never so good, as we are of one suit, though never so fine. A fool and a doily stuff would now and then find days of grace, and be worn for variety.

Milla. I could consent to wear 'em, if they would wear alike; but fools never wear out—they are such *drap-de-berry* things ! Without one could give 'em to one's chambermaid after a day or two.

Mrs. Mar. 'Twere better so indeed. Or what think you of the play-house ? A fine gay glossy fool should be given there, like a new masking habit, after the masquerade is over, and we have done with the disguise. For a fool's visit is always a disguise ; and never admitted by a woman of wit, but to blind her affair with a lover of sense. If you would but appear barefaced now, and own Mirabell, you might as easily put off Petulant and Witwoud, as your hood and scarf. And, indeed 'tis time, for the town has found it : the secret is grown too big for the pretence : 'tis like Mrs. Primly's great belly ; she may face it down before, but it burnishes on her hips. Indeed, Millamant, you can no more conceal it, than my Lady Strammel can her

face, that goodly face, which in defiance of her Rhenish-wine tea, will not be comprehended in a mask.

Milla. I 'll take my death, Marwood, you are more censorious than a decayed beauty, or a discarded toast. Mincing, tell the men they may come up. My aunt is not dressing here ; their folly is less provoking than your malice. [Exit *Mincing*] The town has found it. What has it found ? That Mirabell loves me is no more a secret, than it is a secret that you discovered it to my aunt, or than the reason why you discovered it is a secret.

Mrs. Mar. You are nettled.

Milla. You 're mistaken. Ridiculous !

Mrs. Mar. Indeed, my dear, you 'll tear another fan, if you don't mitigate those violent airs.

Milla. Oh, silly ! Ha, ha, ha ! I could laugh immoderately. Poor Mirabell ! His constancy to me has quite destroyed his complaisance or all the world beside : I swear, I never enjoined it him, to be so coy.—If I had the vanity to think he would obey me, I would command him to show more gallantry.—'Tis hardly well bred to be so particular on one hand, and so insensible on the other. But I despair to prevail, and so let him follow his own way. Ha, ha, ha ! Pardon me, dear creature, I must laugh, ha, ha, ha ! though I grant you 'tis a little barbarous, ha, ha, ha !

Mrs. Mar. What pity 'tis, so much fine raillery, and delivered with so significant gesture, should be so unhappily directed to miscarry.

Milla. Ha ? Dear creature, I ask your pardon.—I swear I did not mind you.

Mrs. Mar. Mr. Mirabell and you both may think it a thing impossible, when I shall tell him by telling you—

Milla. Oh, dear, what ? For it is the same thing, if I hear it. Ha, ha, ha !

Mrs. Mar. That I detest him, hate him, madam.

Milla. Oh, madam, why, so do I—and yet the creature loves me, ha, ha, ha ! How can one forbear laughing to think of it ? I am a sybil if I am not amazed to think what he can see in me. I 'll take my death, I think you are handsomer—and within a year or two as young. If you could but stay for me, I should overtake you—but that cannot be. Well, that thought makes me melancholic—now I 'll be sad.

Mrs. Mar. Your merry note may be changed sooner than you think.

Milla. D' ye say so ? Then I 'm resolved I 'll have a song to keep up my spirits.

Enter Mincing

Minc. The gentlemen stay but to comb, madam ; and will wait on you.

Milla. Desire Mrs.—that is in the next room to sing the song I would have learnt yesterday. You shall hear it, madam.—Not that there 's any great matter in it—but 'tis agreeable to my humour.

SONG

I

Love 's but the frailty of the mind,
When 'tis not with ambition joined ;
A sickly flame, which if not fed expires ;
And feeding, wastes in self-consuming fires.

II

'Tis not to wound a wanton boy
Or am'rous youth, that gives the joy ;
But 'tis the glory to have pierced a swain,
For whom inferior beauties sighed in vain.

III

Then I alone the conquest prize,
When I insult a rival's eyes :
If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
That heart which others bleed for, bleed for me.

Enter Petulant and Witwoud

- Milla.* Is your animosity composed, gentlemen ?
- Wit.* Raillery, raillery, madam, we have no animosity—we hit off a little wit now and then, but no animosity. The falling out of wits is like the falling out of lovers. We agree in the main like treble and bass. Ha, Petulant ?
- Pet.* Ay, in the main, but when I have a humour to contradict—
- Wit.* Ay, when he has a humour to contradict, then I contradict too. What, I know my cue. Then we contradict one another like two battledores ; for contradictions beget one another like Jews.

- Pet.* If he says black 's black—if I have a humour to say 'tis blue—let that pass—all 's one for that. If I have a humour to prove it, it must be granted.
- Wit.* Not positively must—but it may—it may.
- Pet.* Yes, it positively must, upon proof positive.
- Wit.* Ay, upon proof positive it must; but upon proof presumptive it only may. That 's a logical distinction now, madam.
- Mrs. Mar.* I perceive your debates are of importance, and very learnedly handled.
- Pet.* Importance is one thing, and learning 's another; but a debate 's a debate, that I assert.
- Wit.* Petulant 's an enemy to learning; he relies altogether on his parts.
- Pet.* No, I 'm no enemy to learning; it hurts not me.
- Mrs. Mar.* That 's a sign indeed it 's no enemy to you.
- Pet.* No, no, it 's no enemy to anybody, but them that have it.
- Milla.* Well, an illiterate man 's my aversion, I wonder at the impudence of any illiterate man, to offer to make love.
- Wit.* That I confess I wonder at too.
- Milla.* Ah ! to marry an ignorant ! that can hardly read or write.
- Pet.* Why should a man be any further from being married though he can't read, than he is from being hanged ? The ordinary 's paid for setting the Psalm, and the parish-priest for reading the ceremony. And for the rest which is to follow in both cases, a man may do it without book—so all 's one for that.

Milla. D 'ye hear the creature ? Lord, here 's company,
I 'll be gone. [Exeunt *Millamant and Mincing*

Enter Sir Wilful Witwoud in a riding dress, and Footman

Wit. In the name of Bartlemew and his fair, what
have we here.

Mrs. Mar. 'Tis your brother, I fancy. Don't you know
him ?

Wit. Not I. Yes, I think it is he.—I 've almost forgot
him ; I have not seen him since the Revolution.

Foot. Sir, my lady's dressing. Here 's company ; if you
please to walk in, in the meantime.

Sir Wil. Dressing ! What, it 's but morning here I warrant
with you in London ; we should count it towards
afternoon in our parts, down in Shropshire. Why,
then, belike my aunt han't dined yet—ha, friend ?

Foot. Your aunt, sir ?

Sir Wit. My aunt, sir, yes, my aunt, sir, and your lady,
sir ; your lady is my aunt, sir.—Why, what dost
thou not know me, friend ? Why then, send
somebody hither that does. How long hast thou
lived with thy lady, fellow, ha ?

Foot. A week, sir ; longer than anybody in the house,
except my lady's woman.

Sir Wil. Why, then, belike thou dost not know thy lady,
if thou seest her, ha, friend ?

Foot. Why truly, sir, I cannot safely swear to her face
in a morning, before she is dressed. 'Tis like I
may give a shrewd guess at her by this time.

Sir Wil. Well, prithee try what thou canst do ; if thou
canst not guess, enquire her out, dost hear,

fellow ? And tell her, her nephew, Sir Wilful Witwoud, is in the house.

Foot. I shall, sir.

Sir Wil. Hold ye, hear me, friend ; a word with you in your ear, prithee who are these gallants ?

Foot. Really, sir, I can't tell ; here come so many here, 'tis hard to know 'em all. [Exit]

Sir Wil. Oons, this fellow knows less than a starling ; I don't think a' knows his own name.

Mrs. Mar. Mr. Witwoud, your brother is not behind-hand in forgetfulness. I fancy he has forgot you too.

Wit. I hope so—The devil take him that remembers first, say.

Sir Wil. Save you, gentlemen and lady.

Mrs. Mar. For shame, Mr. Witwoud ; why won't you speak to him ?—And you, sir.

Wit. Petulant, speak.

Pet. And you, sir.

Sir Wil. No offence, I hope. [Salutes Mrs. Marwood]

Mrs. Mar. No, sure, sir.

Wit. This is a vile dog, I see that already. No offence ! Ha, ha, ha ! To him ; to him, Petulant, smoke him.

Pet. It seems as if you had come a journey sir ; hem, hem. [Surveying him round]

Sir Wil. Very likely, sir, that it may seem so.

Pet. No offence, I hope, sir.

Wit. Smoke the boots, the boots ; Petulant, the boots ; ha, ha, ha !

Sir Wil. Maybe not, sir ; thiereafter as 'tis meant, sir.

Pet. Sir, I presume upon the information of your boots.

Sir Wil. Why, 'tis like you may, sir : if you are not satisfied with the information of my boots, sir, if you will step to the stable, you may enquire further of my horse, sir.

Pet. Your horse, sir ! Your horse is an ass, sir ?

Sir Wil. Do you speak by way of offence, sir ?

Mrs. Mar. The gentleman 's merry, that 's all, sir. [Aside] 'Slife, we shall have a quarrel betwixt an horse and an ass, before they find one another out. [Aloud] You must not take anything amiss from your friends, sir. You are among your friends here, though it may be you don't know it. If I am not mistaken you are Sir Wilful Witwoud.

Sir Wil. Right, lady ; I am Sir Wilful Witwoud, so I write myself ; no offence to anybody, I hope ; and nephew to the Lady Wishfort of this mansion.

Mrs. Mar. Don't you know this gentleman, sir ?

Sir Wil. Hum ! what, sure 'tis not—Yea, By our Lady, but 'tis. 'Sheart, I know not whether 'tis or no. Yea, but 'tis, by the Wrekin. Brother Antony ! What, Tony, i' faith ! What, dost thou not know me ? By our Lady, nor I thee, thou art so becrawled, and so beperiwigged. 'Sheart, why dost not speak ? Art thou o'erjoyed ?

Wit. Odso, brother, is it you ? Your servant, brother.

Sir Wil. Your servant ! Why yours, sir. Your servant again. 'Sheart, and your friend and servant to that—and a—(puff) and a flap dragon for your service, sir ; and a hare's foot, and a hare's scut for your service, sir ; and you be so cold and so courtly !

Wit. No offence, I hope, brother.

Sir Wil. 'Sheart, sir, but there is, and much offence.—A pox, is this your Inns o' Court breeding, not to know your friends and your relations, your elders, and your betters ?

Wit. Why, brother Wilful of Salop, you may be as short as a Shrewsbury cake, if you please. But I tell you 'tis not modish to know relations in town. You think you 're in the country, where great lubberly brothers slabber and kiss one another when they meet, like a call of serjeants—'Tis not the fashion here ; 'tis not indeed, dear brother.

Sir Wil. The fashion 's a fool ; and you 're a fop, dear brother. 'Sheart, I 've suspected this.—By our Lady, I conjectured you were a fop, since you began to change the style of your letters, and write in a scrap of paper gilt round the edges, no bigger than a subpoena. I might expect this when you left off, Honoured Brother ; and hoping you are in good health, and so forth—to begin with a Rat me, Knight, I 'm so sick of a last night's debauch. Ods heart, and then tell a familiar tale of a cock and a bull, and a whore and a bottle, and so conclude. You could write news before you were out of your time, when you lived with honest Pumple-Nose, the attorney of Furnival's Inn. You could entreat to be remembered then to your friends round the Wrekin. We could have *Gazettes* then, the *Dawk's Letter*, and the *Weekly Bill*, till of late days.

Pet. 'Slife, Witwoud, were you ever an attorney's clerk ? Of the family of the Furnivals ? Ha, ha, ha !

Wit. Ay, ay, but that was but for a while. Not long, not long ; pshaw, I was not in my own power then. An orphan, and this fellow was my guardian ; ay, ay, I was glad to consent to that man to come to London. He had the disposal of me then. If I had not agreed to that, I might have been bound prentice to a felt-maker in Shrewsbury ; this fellow would have bound me to a maker of felts.

Sir Wil. 'Sheart, and better than to be bound to a maker of fops ; where, I suppose, you have served your time ; and now you may set up for yourself.

Mrs. Mar. You intend to travel, sir, as I 'm informed.

Sir Wil. Belike I may, madam. I may chance to sail upon the salt seas, if my mind hold.

Pet. And the wind serve.

Sir Wil. Serve or not serve, I shan't ask licence of you, sir ; nor the weather-cock your companion. I direct my discourse to the lady, sir. 'Tis like my aunt may have told you, madam. Yes, I have settled my concerns, I may say now, and am minded to see foreign parts. If and how that the peace holds, whereby that is taxes abate.

Mrs. Mar. I thought you had designed for France at all adventures.

Sir Wil. I can't tell that ; 'tis like I may, and 'tis like I may not. I am somewhat dainty in making a resolution, because when I make it I keep it. I

don't stand shill I, shall I, then ; if I say 't, I 'll do 't. But I have thoughts to tarry a small matter in town, to learn somewhat of your lingo first, before I cross the seas. I 'd gladly have a spice of your French as they say, whereby to hold discourse in foreign countries.

Mrs. Mar. Here 's an academy in town for that use.

Sir Wil. There is ? 'Tis like there may.

Mrs. Mar. No doubt you will return very much improved.

Wit. Yes, refined like Dutch skipper from a whale-fishing.

Enter Lady Wishfort and Fainall

Lady. Nephew, you are welcome.

Sir Wil. Aunt, your servant.

Fain. Sir Wilful, your most faithful servant.

Sir Wil. Cousin Fainall, give me your hand.

Lady. Cousin Witwoud, your servant ; Mr. Petulant, your servant—nephew, you are welcome again. Will you drink anything after your journey, nephew, before you eat ? Dinner 's almost ready.

Sir Wil. I 'm very well, I thank you, aunt. However, I thank you for your courteous offer. 'Sheart, I was afraid you would have been in the fashion too, and have remembered to have forgot your relations. Here 's your cousin Tony, belike, I may n't call him brother for fear of offence.

Lady. Oh, he 's a rallier, nephew— my cousin 's a wit ; and your great wits always rally their best friends to choose. When you have been abroad, nephew, you 'll understand raillery better.

[*Fainall and Mrs. Marwood talk apart*]

Sir Wil. Why then let him hold his tongue in the meantime, and rail when that day comes.

Enter Mincing

Minc. Mem, I come to acquaint your la'ship that dinner is impatient.

Sir Wil. Impatient? Why then belike it won't stay till I pull off my boots. Sweetheart, can you help me to a pair of slippers?—My man's with his horses, I warrant.

Lady. Fie, fie, nephew, you would not pull off your boots here—go down into the hall—dinner shall stay for you. My nephew's a little unbred, you'll pardon him, madam. Gentlemen, will you walk? Marwood?

Mrs. Mar. I'll follow you, madam,—before Sir Wilful is ready.

[*Exeunt all except Fainall and Mrs. Marwood*]

Fain. Why then Foible's a bawd, an errant, rank, match-making bawd. And I, it seems, am a husband, a rank husband; and my wife a very errant, rank wife,—all in the Way of the World. 'Sdeath, to be a cuckold by anticipation, a cuckold in embryo! Sure I was born with budding antlers like a young satyr, or a citizen's child. 'Sdeath, to be out-witted, to be out-jilted, out-matrimonied. If I had kept my speed like a stag, 'twere somewhat,—but to crawl after, with my horns like a snail, and be outstripped by my wife—'tis scurvy wedlock.

Mrs. Mar. Then shake it off, you have often wished for an opportunity to part; and now you have it. But

first prevent their plot: the half of Millamant's fortune is too considerable to be parted with, to a foe, to Mirabell.

Fain. Damn him, that had been mine, had you not made that fond discovery—that had been forfeited, had they been married. My wife had added lustre to my horns, by that increase of fortune, I could have worn 'em tipped with gold, though my forehead had been furnished like a deputy-lieutenant's hall.

Mrs. Mar. They may prove a cap of maintenance to you still, if you can away with your wife. And she 's no worse than when you had her. I dare swear she had given up her game, before she was married.

Fain. Hum ! That may be—

Mrs. Mar. You married her to keep you ; and if you can contrive to have her keep you better than you expected, why should you not keep her longer than you intended ?

Fain. The means, the means.

Mrs. Mar. Discover to my lady your wife's conduct ; threaten to part with her—my lady loves her, and will come to any composition to save her reputation. Take the opportunity of breaking it, just upon the discovery of this imposture. My lady will be enraged beyond bounds, and sacrifice niece, and fortune, and all at that conjuncture. And let me alone to keep her warm ; if she should flag in her part, I will not fail to prompt her.

Fain. Faith, this has an appearance.

Mrs. Mar. I 'm sorry I hinted to my lady to endeavour a match between Millamant and Sir Wilful, that may be an obstacle.

Fain. Oh, for that matter leave me to manage him ; I 'll disable him for that, he will drink like a Dane : after dinner, I 'll set his hand in.

Mrs. Mar. Well, how do you stand affected towards your lady ?

Fain. Why faith I 'm thinking of it.—Let me see—I am married already ; so that 's over. My wife has played the jade with me—well, that 's over too—I never loved her, or if I had, why that would have been over too by this time. Jealous of her I cannot be, for I am certain ; so there 's an end of jealousy. Weary of her, I am and shall be—no, there 's no end of that ; no, no, that were too much to hope. Thus far concerning my repose. Now for my reputation. As to my own, I married not for it ; so that 's out of the question. And as to my part in my wife's—why she had parted with hers before ; so bringing none to me, she can take none from me ; 'tis against all rule of play, that I should lose to one who has not wherewithal to stake.

Mrs. Mar. Besides, you forget, marriage is honourable.

Fain. Hum ! Faith, and that 's well thought on ; marriage is honourable, as you say ; and if so, wherefore should cuckoldom be a discredit, being derived from so honourable a root.

Mrs. Mar. Nay, I know not ; if the root be honourable, why not the branches ?

Fain. So, so, why this point 's clear.—Well, how do we proceed ?

Mrs. Mar. I will contrive a letter which shall be delivered to my lady at the time when that rascal who is to act Sir Rowland is with her. It shall come as from an unknown hand—for the less I appear to know of the truth, the better I can play the incendiary. Besides, I would not have Foible provoked if I could help it,—because you know she knows some passages—nay, I expect all will come out—but let the mine be sprung first, and then I care not if I am discovered.

Fain. If the worst come to the worst,—I 'll turn my wife to grass—I have already a deed of settlement of the best part of her estate ; which I wheedled out of her ; and that you shall partake at least.

Mrs. Mar. I hope you are convinccd that I hate Mirabell now : you 'll be no more jealous ?

Fain. Jealous, no,—by this kiss—let husbands be jealous ; but let the lover still believe : or if he doubt, let it be only to endear his pleasure, and prepare the joy that follows, when he proves his mistress true. But let husbands' doubts convert to endless jealousy ; or if they have belief, let it corrupt to superstition, and blind credulity. I am single, and will herd no more with 'em. True, I wear the badge, but I 'll disown the order. And since I take my leave of 'em, I care not if I leave 'em a common motto to their common crest.

All husbands must, or pain, or shame, endure ;
The wise too jealous are, fools too secure.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT FOUR

A room in Lady Wishfort's house

Lady Wishfort and Foible

- Lady.* Is Sir Rowland coming, sayest thou, Foible? and are things in order?
- Foib.* Yes, madam. I have put wax-lights in the sconces; and placed the footmen in a row in the hall, in their best liveries, with the coachman and postillion to fill up the equipage.
- Lady.* Have you pulvilled the coachman and postillion, that they may not stink of the stable, when Sir Rowland comes by?
- Foib.* Yes, madam.
- Lady.* And are the dancers and the music ready, that he may be entertained in all points with correspondence to his passion?
- Foib.* All is ready, madam.
- Lady.* And—well—and how do I look, Foible?
- Foib.* Most killing well, madam.
- Lady.* Well, and how shall I receive him? In what figure shall I give his heart the first impression? There is a great deal in the first impression. Shall I sit? —No, I won't sit—I 'll walk—ay, I 'll walk from the door upon his entrance; and then turn full upon him.—No, that will be too sudden. I 'll lie —ay, I 'll lie down—I 'll receive him in my little dressing-room, there 's a couch—yes, yes, I 'll give the first impression on a couch. I won't lie neither, but loll and lean upon one elbow; with

one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way—yes—and then as soon as he appears, start, ay, start and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder. Yes, oh, nothing is more alluring than a levee from a couch in some confusion. It shows the foot to advantage, and furnishes with blushes, and re-composing airs beyond comparison. Hark ! There 's coach.

Foib. 'Tis he, madam.

Lady. Oh, dear, has my nephew made his addresses to Millamant ? I ordered him.

Foib. Sir Wilful is set in to drinking, madam, in the parlour.

Lady. Ods my life, I 'll send him to her. Call her down, Foible ; bring her hither. I 'll send him as I go.— When they are together, then come to me, Foible, that I may not be too long alone with Sir Rowland.

[*Exit*

Enter Mrs. Millamant and Mrs. Fainall

Foib. Madam, I stayed here, to tell your ladyship that Mr. Mirabell has waited this half-hour for an opportunity to talk with you. Though my lady's orders were to leave you and Sir Wilful together. Shall I tell Mr. Mirabell that you are at leisure ?

Milla. No—what would the dear man have ? I am thoughtful, and would amuse myself. Bid him come another time.

[*Repeating and walking about*]

There never yet was woman made,
Nor shall, but to be cursed.

That 's hard !

Mrs. Fain. You are very fond of Sir John. Suckling today, Millamant, and the poets.

Milla. Ha ? Ay, and filthy verses—so I am.

Foib. Sir Wilful is coming, madam. Shall I send Mr. Mirabell away ?

Milla. Ay, if you please, Foible, send him away,—or send him hither,—just as you will, dear Foible.—I think I 'll see him. Shall I ? Ay, let the wretch come.

[*Exit Foible*

Thyrsis, a youth of the inspired train. [Repeating
Dear Fainall, entertain Sir Wilful. Thou hast
philosophy to undergo a fool, thou art married
and hast patience. I would confer with my own
thoughts.

Mrs. Fain. I am obliged to you, that you would make me your proxy in this affair ; but I have business of my own.

Enter Sir Wilful

Mrs. Fain. O Sir Wilful ; you are come at the critical instant. There 's your mistress up to the ears in love and contemplation, pursue your point, now or never.

Sir Wil. Yes ; my aunt will have it so,—I would gladly have been encouraged with a bottle or two, because I 'm somewhat wary at first, before I am acquainted ;—[*This while Millamant walks about repeating to herself.*] But I hope, after a time, I shall break my mind—that is upon further acquaintance. So, for the present, cousin, I 'll

take my leave—if so be you 'll be so kind to make my excuse, I 'll return to my company.

Mrs. Fain. Oh, fie, Sir Wilful ! What, you must not be daunted.

Sir Wil. Daunted, no, that 's not it, it is not so much for that—for if so be that I set on 't, I 'll do 't. But only for the present, 'tis sufficient till further acquaintance, that 's all—your servant.

Mrs. Fain. Nay, I 'll swear you shall never lose so favourable an opportunity, if I can help it. I 'll leave you together, and lock the door. [Exit

Sir Wil. Nay, nay, cousin—I have forgot my gloves.—What d' ye do ? 'Sheart, a' has locked the door indeed. I think. Nay, Cousin Fainall, open the door—Pshaw, what a vixen trick is this ? Nay, now a' has seen me too. Cousin, I made bold to pass through as it were. I think this door 's enchanted—

Milla. [Repeating.]

I prithee spare me, gentle boy.
Press me no more for that slight toy.

Sir Wil. Anan ? Cousin, your servant.

Milla. That foolish trifle of a heart. Sir Wilful !

Sir Wil. Yes—your servant. No offence, I hope, cousin.

Milla. [Repeating].

I swear it will not do its part,
Though thou dost thine, employ'st thy power and art.
Natural, easy Suckling.

Sir Wil. Anan ? Suckling ? No such suckling neither, cousin, nor stripling : I thank Heaven, I 'm no minor.

Milla. Ah, rustic, ruder than Gothic.

Sir Wil. Well, well, I shall understand your lingo one of these days, cousin, in the meanwhile I must answer in plain English.

Milla. Have you any business with me, Sir Wilful ?

Sir Wil. Not at present, cousin.—Yes, I made bold to see, to come and know if that how you were disposed to fetch a walk this evening, if so be that I might not be troublesome, I would have sought a walk with you.

Milla. A walk ? What then ?

Sir Wil. Nay, nothing—only for the walk's sake, that 's all—

Milla. I nauseate walking ; 'tis a country diversion, I loathe the country and everything that relates to it.

Sir Wil. Indeed ! Hah ! Look ye, look ye, you do ? Nay, 'tis like you may. Here are choice of pastimes here in town, as plays and the like, that must be confessed indeed—

Milla. *Ah, l'etourdi !* I hate the town too.

Sir Wil. Dear heart, that 's much—Ha ! that you should hate 'em both ! Ha ! 'tis like you may ; there are some can 't relish the town, and others can 't away with the country,—'tis like you may be one of those, cousin.

Milla. Ha, ha, ha ! Yes, 'tis like I may.—You have nothing further to say to me ?

Sir Wil. Not at present, cousin.—'Tis like when I have an opportunity to be more private, I may break my mind in some measure—I conjecture you partly

guess—However, that 's as time shall try,—but
spare to speak and spare to speed, as they say.

Milla. If it is of no great importance, Sir Wilful, you will
oblige me to leave me: I have just now a little
business—

Sir Wil. Enough, enough, cousin: yes, all a case—when
you 're disposed, when you 're disposed. Now 's
as well as another time; and another time as well
as now. All 's one for that.—Yes, yes, if your con-
cerns call you, there 's no haste; it will keep cold
as they say.—Cousin, your servant.—I think this
door 's locked.

Milla. You may go this way, sir.

Sir Wil. Your servant, then with your leave I 'll return to
my company.

[Exit]

Milla. Ay, ay ; ha, ha, ha !

Like phoebus sung the no less am'rous boy.

Enter Mirabell

Mira. Like Daphne she, as lovely and as coy.

Do you lock yourself up from me, to make my
search more curious? Or is this pretty artifice
contrived, to signify that here the chase must end,
and my pursuit be crowned, for you can fly no
further.

Milla. Vanity! No—I 'll fly and be followed to the last
moment, though I am upon the very verge of
matrimony, I expect you should solicit me as much
as if I were wavering at the gate of a monastery,
with one foot over the threshold. I 'll be solicited
to the very last, nay and afterwards,

Mira. What, after the last ?

- Milla.* Oh, I should think I was poor and had nothing to bestow, if I were reduced to an inglorious ease, and freed from the agreeable fatigues of solicitation.
- Mira.* But do not you know, that when favours are conferred upon instant and tedious solicitation, that they diminish in their value, and that both the giver loses the grace, and the receiver lessens his pleasure ?
- Milla.* It may be in things of common application ; but never sure in love. Oh, I hate a lover that can dare to think he draws a moment's air, independent of the bounty of his mistress. There is not so impudent a thing in nature, as the saucy look of an assured man, confident of success. The pedantic arrogance of a very husband has not so pragmatical an air. Ah ! I 'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure.
- Mira.* Would you have 'm both before marriage ? Or will you be contented with the first now, and stay for the other till after grace ?
- Milla.* Ah, don't be impertinent. My dear liberty, shall I leave thee ? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you then adieu ? Ay, adieu—my morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye *douceurs*, ye *sommeils du matin*, adieu—I can't do 't, 'tis more than impossible.—Positively, Mirabell, I 'll lie abed in a morning as long as I please.
- Mira.* Then I 'll get up in a morning as early.as I please.

- Milla.* Ah ! Idle creature, get up when you will. And, d' ye hear, I won't be called names after I 'm married ; positively I won't be called names.
- Mira.* Names !
- Milla.* Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar, I shall never bear that.—God Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis : nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers ; and then, never be seen there together again : as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange and well bred : let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while ; and as well bred as if we were not married at all.
- Mira.* Have you any more conditions to offer ? Hitherto your demands are pretty reasonable.
- Milla.* Trifles—as liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please ; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part ; to wear what I please ; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste ; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance ; or to be intimate with fools because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please, dine in my dressing-room when I 'm out of

humour, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate ; to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

Mira. Your bill of fare is something advanced in this latter account. Well, have I liberty to offer conditions,—that when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband ?

Milla. You have free leave, propose your utmost, speak and spare not.

Mira. I thank you. *Imprimis* then, I covenant that your acquaintance be general ; that you admit no sworn confidante, or intimate of your own sex ; no she friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy-duck to wheedle you a fop, scrambling to the play in a mask, then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out,—and rail at me for missing the play, and disappointing the frolic which you had to pick me up and prove my constancy.

Milla. Detestable *imprimis* ! I go to the play in a mask !

Mira. Item, I article that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall : and while it passes current with me, that you endeavour not to new coin it.

To which end, together with all vizards for the day, I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled-skins and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat. In short, I forbid all commerce with the gentlewoman in what-d'ye-call it Court. *Item*, I shut my doors against all bawds with baskets, and pennyworths of muslin, china, fans, atlases, etc.—*Item*, when you shall be breeding—

Milla. Ah ! Name it not.

Mira. Which may be presumed, with a blessing on our endeavours—

Milla. Odious endeavours !

Mira. I denounce against all strait lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mould my boy's head like a sugar-loaf ; and instead of a man-child, make me father to a crooked billet. Lastly, to the dominion of the tea-table I submit.—But with proviso, that you exceed not in your province ; but restrain yourself to native and simple tea-table drinks, as tea, chocolate, and coffee. As likewise to genuine and authorized tea-table talk—such as mending of fashions, spoiling reputations, railing at absent friends, and so forth—but that on no account you encroach upon the men's prerogative, and presume to drink healths, or toast fellows ; for prevention of which I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to the tea-table, as orange-brandy, all aniseed, cinnamon, citron and Barbadoes-waters, together with ratafia and the most noble spirit of clary. But for cowslipwine, poppy-water, and all

dormitives, those I allow. These provisoes admitted, in other things I may prove a tractable and complying husband.

Milla. Oh, horrid provisoes ! filthy strong waters ! I toast fellows, odious men ! I hate your odious provisoes.

Mira. Then we 're agreed. Shall I kiss your hand upon the contract ? and here comes one to be a witness to the sealing of the deed.

Enter Mrs. Fainall

Milla. Fainall, what shall I do ? Shall I have him ? I think I must have him.

Mrs. Fain Ay, ay, take him, take him, what should you do ?

Milla. Well then, I 'll take my death I 'm in a horrid fright—Fainall, I shall never say it—well, I think I 'll endure you.

Mrs. Fain. Fie, fie, have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms : for I am sure you have a mind to him.

Milla. Are you ? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too. Well, you ridiculous thing, you, I 'll have you.—I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked.—Here, kiss my hand though : so, hold your tongue now, don't say a word.

Mrs. Fain. Mirabell, there 's a necessity for your obedience ; you have neither time to talk nor stay. My mother is coming ; and in my conscience, if she should see you, would fall into fits, and maybe not recover in time enough to return to Sir Rowland ; who, as

Foible tells me, is in a fair way to succeed. Therefore spare your ecstasies for another occasion, and slip down the back stairs, where Foible waits to consult you.

Milla. Ay, go, go. In the meantime I suppose you have said something to please me.

Mira. I am all obedience. [Exit]

Mrs. Fain. Yonder Sir Wilful's drunk ; and so noisy that my mother has been forced to leave Sir Rowland to appease him ; but he answers her only with singing and drinking. What they may have done by this time I know not ; but Petulant and he were upon quarrelling as I came by.

Milla. Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing ;—for I find I love him violently.

Mrs. Fain. So it seems ; for you mind not what 's said to you.—If you doubt him, you had best take up with Sir Wilful.

Milla. How can you name that superannuated lubber ?
Foh !

Enter Witwoud, from drinking

Mrs. Fain. So is the fray made up, that you have left 'em ?

Wit. Left 'em ? I could stay no longer—I have laughed like ten christenings.—I am tipsy with laughing.—If I had stayed any longer I should have burst,—I must have been let out and pieced in the sides like an unsized camlet. Yes, yes, the fray is composed ; my lady came in like a *nolle prosequi*, and stopped the proceedings.

Milla. What was the dispute ?

Wit. That 's the jest ; there was no dispute. They could neither of 'em speak for rage ; and so fell a sputtering at one another like two roasting apples.

Enter Petulant, drunk

Wit. Now, Petulant, all 's over, all 's well ? Gad, my head begins to whim it about. Why dost thou not speak ? thou art both as drunk and as mute as a fish !

Pet. Look you, Mrs. Millamant—if you can love me, dear nymph—say it—and that 's the conclusion : pass on, or pass off, that 's all.

Wit. Thou hast uttered volumes, folios, in less than *decimo sexto*, my dear Lacedæmonian. Sirrah, Petulant, thou art an epitomizer of words.

Pet. Witwoud—you are an annihilator of sense.

Wit. Thou art a retailer of phrase ; and dost deal in remnants of remnants, like a maker of pin-cushions—thou art in truth (metaphorically speaking) a speaker of shorthand.

Pet. Thou art (without a figure) just one half of an ass, and Baldwin yonder, thy half-brother, is the rest—a Gemini of asses split would make just four of you.

Wit. Thou dost bite, my dear mustard-seed ; kiss me for that.

Pet. Stand off—I 'll kiss no more males,—I have kissed your twin yonder in a humour or reconciliation, till he (*hiccup*) rises upon my stomach like a radish.

- Milla.* Eh ! filthy creature—what was the quarrel ?
- Pet.* There was no quarrel—there might have been a quarrel.
- Wit.* If there had been words enow between 'em to have expressed provocation, they had gone together by the ears like a pair of castanets.
- Pet.* You were the quarrel.
- Milla.* Me !
- Pet.* If I have a humour to quarrel, I can make less matters conclude premises.—If you are not handsome, what then ; if I have a humour to prove it ?—If I shall have my reward, say so ; if not, fight for your face the next time yourself—I 'll go sleep.
- Wit.* Do, wrap thyself up like a woodlouse, and dream revenge.—And hear me, if thou canst learn to write by to-morrow morning, pen me a challenge—I 'll carry it for thee.
- Pet.* Carry your mistress's monkey a spider. Go flea dogs, and read romances—I 'll go to bed to my maid. [Exit]
- Mrs. Fain.* He 's horribly drunk—how came you all in this pickle ?
- Wit.* A plot, a plot, to get rid of the knight,—your husband's advice ; but he sneaked off.
- Enter Sir Wilful, drunk, and Lady Wishfort*
- Lady.* Out upon 't, out upon 't, at years of discretion, and comport yourself at this rantipole rate.
- Sir Wil.* No offence, aunt.
- Lady.* Offence ? As I 'm a person, I 'm ashamed of you —Foh ! how you stink of wine ! D' ye think my

niece will ever endure such a Borachio ! you 're an absolute Borachio.

Sir Wil. Borachio !

Lady. At a time when you should commence an amour, and put your best foot foremost—

Sir Wil. 'Sheart. an you grudge me your liquor, make a bill.—Give me more drink, and take my purse.

[*Sings*]

Prihee fill me the glass
Till it laugh in my face,
With ale that is potent and mellow :
He that whines for a lass
Is an ignorant ass,
For a *bumper* has not its fellow.

But if you would have me marry my cousin, say the word, and I 'll do 't—Wilful will do 't. that 's the word—Wilful will do 't, that 's my crest—my motto I have forgot.

Lady. My nephew 's a little overtaken, cousin—but 'tis with drinking your health. O' my word you are obliged to him—

Sir Wil. *In vino veritas*, aunt. If I drunk your health today, cousin, I am a Borachio. But if you have a mind to be married, say the word, and send for the piper, Wilful will do 't. If not, dust it away, and let 't have 't other round—Tony. Odds heart, where 's Tony ? Tony 's an honest fellow, but he spits after a bumper, and that 's a fault. [*Sings*]

We 'll drink and we 'll never have done, boys,
Put the glass then around with the sun, boys,

Let Apollo's example invite us :

For he 's drunk every night,
And that makes him so bright,
That he 's able next morning to light us.

The sun 's a good pimple, an honest soaker, he has a cellar at your Antipodes. If I travel, aunt, I touch at your Antipodes—your Antipodes are a good rascally sort of topsy-turvy fellows—if I had a bumper I 'd stand upon my head and drink a health to 'em.—A match or no match, cousin, with the hard name Aunt, Wilful will do 't. If she has her maidenhead let her look to 't ; if she has not, let her keep her own counsel in the meantime, and cry out at the nine months' end.

Milla. Your pardon, madam, I can stay no longer. Sir Wilful grows very powerful. Ugh ! how he smells ! I shall be overcome if I stay. Come, cousin.

[*Exeunt Millamant and Mrs. Fainall*

Lady. Smells ! he would poison a tallow-chandler and his family. Beastly creature, I know not what to do with him. Travel, quotha ! ay, travel, get thee gone ; get thee but far enough, to the Saracens, or the Tartars, or the Turks—for thou art not fit to live in a Christian commonwealth, thou beastly pagan.

Sir Wil. Turks, no ; no Turks, aunt : your Turks are infidels, and believe not in the grape. Your Mahometan, your Mussulman is a dry stinkard—no offence, aunt. My map says that your Turk is not so honest a man as your Christian—I cannot find by the map that your mufti is orthodox—whereby it is a plain case, that orthodox is a hard word, aunt, and (*hiccup*) Greek for claret.

[*Sings*]

To drink is a Christian diversion
 Unknown to the Turk or the Persian :
 Let Mahometan fools
 Live by heathenish rules,
 And be damned over tea-cups and coffee.
 But let British lads sing,
 Crown a health to the king,
 And a fig for your Sultan and Sophy.

Ah, Tony !

Enter Foible, and whispers to Lady Wishfort

- Lady.* Sir Rowland impatient ? Good luck ! what shall I do with this beastly tumbrill ? —Go lie down and sleep, you sot—or as I'm a person, I'll have you bastinadoed with broomsticks. Call up the wenches with broomsticks.
- Sir Wil.* Aha ? Wenches, where are the wenches ?
- Lady.* Dear Cousin Witwoud, get him away, and you will bind me to you inviolably. I have an affair of moment that invades me with some precipitation. You will oblige me to all futurity.
- Wit.* Come, knight—pox on him, I don't know what to say to him—will you go to a cock match ?
- Sir Wil.* With a wench, Tony ? Is she a shake-bag, sirrah ? Let me bite your cheek for that.
- Wit.* Horrible ! He has a breath like a bagpipe. Ay, ay, come, you march, my Salopian ?
- Sir Wil.* Lead on, little Tony—I'll follow thee, my Anthony, my Tantony. Sirrah, thou shalt be my Tantony, and I'll be thy pig.
 —And a fig for your Sultan and Sophy.

[Exit, singing, with Witwoud.]

Lady. This will never do. It will never make a match—at least before he has been abroad.

Enter Waitwell, disguised as Sir Rowland

Lady. Dear Sir Rowland, I am confounded with confusion at the retrospection of my own rudeness, I have more pardons to ask than the Pope distributes in the year of jubilee. But I hope where there is likely to be so near an alliance, we may unbend the severity of decorum, and dispense with a little ceremony.

Wait. My impatience, madam, is the effect of my transport, and till I have the possession of your adorable person, I am tantalized on the rack ; and do but hang, madam, on the tenter of expectation.

Lady. You have excess of gallantry, Sir Rowland ; and press things to a conclusion, with a most prevailing vehemence.—But a day or two for decency of marriage—

Wait. For decency of funeral, madam. The delay will break my heart—or if that should fail, I shall be poisoned. My nephew will get an inkling of my designs, and poison me, and I would willingly starve him before I die. I would gladly go out of the world with that satisfaction—That would be some comfort to me, if I could but live so long as to be revenged on that unnatural viper.

Lady. Is he so unnatural, say you ? Truly I would contribute much both to the saving of your life, and the accomplishment of your revenge.— Not that I respect myself ; though he has been a perfidious wretch to me.

Wait. Perfidious to you !

Lady. O Sir Rowland, the hours that he has died away at my feet, the tears that he has shed, the oaths that he has sworn, the palpitations that he has felt. the trances and the tremblings, the ardours and the ecstasies, the kneelings and the risings, the heart-heavings and the hand-grippings, the pangs and the pathetic regards of his protesting eyes ! Oh, no memory can register.

Wait. What, my rival ! Is the rebel my rival ? a' dies.

Lady. No, don 't kill him at once, Sir Rowland, starve him gradually inch by inch.

Wait. I 'll do 't. In three weeks he shall be barefoot ; in a month out at knees with begging an alms. —He shall starve upward and upward, till he has nothing living but his head, and then go out in a stink like a candle's end upon a save-all.

Lady. Well, Sir Rowland, you have the way,—you are no novice in the labyrinth of love—you have the clue. But as I am a person, Sir Rowland, you must not attribute my yielding to any sinister appetite, or indigestion of widowhood ; nor impute my complacency to any lethargy of continence. I hope you do not think me prone to any iteration of nuptials—

Wait. Far be it from me—

Lady. If you do, I protest I must recede—or think that I have made a prostitution of decorums, but in the vehemence of compassion, and to save the life of a person of so much importance—

Wait. I esteem it so—

- Lady.* Or else you wrong my condescension—
Wait. I do not, I do not—
Lady. Indeed you do.
Wait. I do not, fair shrine of virtue.
Lady. If you think the least scruple of carnality was an ingredient—
Wait. Dear madam, no. You are all camphor and frankincense, all chastity and odour.
Lady. Or that—

Enter Foible

- Foib.* Madam, the dancers are ready, and there 's one with a letter, who must deliver it into your own hands.
Lady. Sir Rowland, will you give me leave ? Think favourably, judge candidly, and conclude you have found a person who would suffer racks in honour's cause, dear Sir Rowland, and will wait on you incessantly. [Exit
Wait. Fie, fie ! What a slavery have I undergone ; spouse, hast thou any cordial ? I want spirits.
Foib. What a washy rogue art thou, to pant thus for a quarter of an hour's lying and swearing to a fine lady ?
Wait. Oh, she is the antidote to desire. Spouse, thou wilt fare the worse for 't—I shall have no appetite to iteration of nuptials this eight and forty hours.—By this hand I 'd rather be a chairman in the dog-days than act Sir Rowland till this time to-morrow.

Re-enter Lady Wishfort with a letter

- Lady.* Call in the dancers. Sir Rowland, we 'll sit, if

you please, and see the entertainment. [Dance.] Now with your permission, Sir Rowland, I will peruse my letter—I would open it in your presence, because I would not make you uneasy. If it should make you uneasy I would burn it—speak if it does—but you may see, the superscription is like a woman's hand.

Foib. By heaven ! Mrs. Marwood's I know it. My heart aches—get it from her— [Aside to Waitwell]

Wait. A woman's hand ? No, madam, that 's no woman's hand, I see that already. That 's somebody whose throat must be cut.

Lady. Nay, Sir Rowland, since you give me a proof of your passion by your jealousy, I promise you I 'll make a return, by a frank communication—You shall see it—we 'll open it together—look you here.

[Reads] *Madam, though unknown to you—Look you there, 'tis from nobody that I know—I have that honour for your character, that I think myself obliged to let you know you are abused. He who pretends to be Sir Rowland is a cheat and a rascal—*

O heavens ! what 's this ?

Foib. [Aside] Unfortunate, all 's ruined.

Wait. How, how, let me see, let me see. [Reading] *A rascal and disguised, and suborned for that imposture,—O villainy ! O villainy !—by the contrivance of—*

Lady. I shall faint, I shall die, oh !

Foib. Say, 'tis your nephew's hand.—Quickly, his plot, swear, swear it. [Whispers to him]

- Wait.* Here 's a villain ! Madam, don't you perceive it, don't you see it ?
- Lady.* Too well, too well. I have seen too much.
- Wait.* I told you at first, I knew the hand. A woman's hand ? The rascal writes a sort of a large hand ; your Roman hand—I saw there was a throat to be cut presently. If he were my son, as he is my nephew, I 'd pistol him—
- Foib.* Oh, treachery ! But are you sure, Sir Rowland, it is his writing ?
- Wait.* Sure ? Am I here ? do I live ? do I love this pearl of India ? I have twenty letters in my pocket from him, in the same character.
- Lady.* How !
- Foib.* Oh, what luck it is, Sir Rowland, that you were present at this juncture ! This was the business that brought Mr. Mirabell disguised to Madam Millamant this afternoon. I thought something was contriving, when he stole by me and would have hid his face.
- Lady.* How, how !—I heard the villain was in the house indeed ; and now I remember, my niece went away abruptly, when Sir Wilful was to have made his addresses.
- Foib.* Then, then, madam, Mr. Mirabell waited for her in her chamber ; but I would not tell your ladyship to discompose you when you were to receive Sir Rowland.
- Wait.* Enough, his date is short.
- Foib.* No, good Sir Rowland, don 't incur the law.
- Wait.* Law ! I care not for law. I can but die, and 'tis in a good cause.—My lady shall be satisfied of

my truth and innocence, though it cost me my life.

Lady. No, dear Sir Rowland, don't fight, if you should be killed I must never show my face ; or hanged ! Oh, consider my reputation, Sir Rowland. No, you shan't fight.—I 'll go in and examine my niece ; I 'll make her confess. I conjure you, Sir Rowland, by all your love, not to fight.

Wait. I am charmed, madam, I obey. But some proof you must let me give you. I 'll go for a black box, which contains the writings of my whole estate, and deliver that into your hands.

Lady. Ay, dear Sir Rowland, that will be some comfort, bring the black box.

Wait. And may I presume to bring a contract to be signed this night ? May I hope so far ?

Lady. Bring what you will ; but come alive, pray come alive. Oh, this is a happy discovery.

Wait. Dead or alive I 'll come—and married we will be in spite of treachery ; ay, and get an heir that shall defeat the last remaining glimpse of hope in my abandoned nephew. Come, my buxom widow :

Ere long you shall substantial proof receive
That I 'm an arrant knight—

Foib. Or arrant knave. *[Exeunt]*

ACT FIVE

A room in Lady Wishfort's house

Enter Lady Wishfort and Foible

Lady. Out of my house, out of my house, thou viper, thou serpent, that I have fostered ; thou bosom traitress, that I raised from nothing—begone, begone, begone, go, go—that I took from washing of old gauze and weaving of dead hair with a bleak blue nose, over a chafing-dish of starved embers, and dining behind a traverse rag, in a shop no bigger than a bird-cage,—go, go, starve again, do, do.

Foib. Dear madam, I 'll beg pardon on my knees.

Lady. Away, out, out, go set up for yourself again—do, drive a trade, do, with your threepenny-worth of small ware, flaunting upon a packthread, under a brandy-seller's bulk, or against a dead wall by a ballad-monger. Go, hang out an old frisoneer-gorget with a yard of yellow colberteen again ; do ; an old gnawed mask, two rows of pins and a child's fiddle ; a glass necklace with the beads broken, and a quilted nightcap with one ear. Go, go, drive a trade.—These were your commodities, you treacherous trull, this was the merchandise you dealt in, when I took you into my house, placed you next myself, and made you governante of my whole family. You have forgot this, have you, now you have feathered your nest ?

Foib. No, no, dear madam. Do but hear me, have but a moment's patience. I 'll confess all. Mr. Mirabell seduced me ; I am not the first that he has wheedled

with his dissembling tongue ; your ladyship's own wisdom has been deluded by him, then how should I, a poor ignorant, defend myself ? O madam, if you knew but what he promised me, and how he assured me your ladyship should come to no damage—or else the wealth of the Indies should not have bribed me to conspire against so good, so sweet, so kind a lady as you have been to me.

Lady. No damage ? What, to betray me to marry me to a cast-serving-man ; to make me a receptacle, an hospital for a decayed pimp ? No damage ? O thou frontless impudence, more than a big-bellied actress.

Foil. Pray do but hear me, madam, he could not marry your ladyship, madam—no, indeed, his marriage was to have been void in law ; for he was married to me first to secure your ladyship. He could not have bedded your ladyship ; for if he had consummated with your ladyship, he must have run the risk of the law and been put upon his clergy.—Yes, indeed, I enquired of the law in that case before I would meddle or make.

Lady. What, then I have been your property, have I ? I have been convenient to you, it seems while you were catering for Mirabell ? I have been broker for you ? What, have you made a passive bawd of me ?—This exceeds all precedent ; I am brought to fine uses, to become a botcher of second-hand marriages between Abigail and Andrews ! I 'll couple you. Yes, I 'll baste you together, you and your Philander, I 'll Duke's Place you, as I 'm a person. Your turtle is in custody already : you shall coo in the same cage, if there be constable or warrant in the parish.

[Exit.]

Foib. O that ever I was born, O that I was ever married,—
a bride, ay, I shall be a Bridewell-bride—Oh ! [Cries]

Enter Mrs. Fainall

Mrs. Fain. Poor Foible, what 's the matter ?

Foib. O madam, my lady 's gone for a constable ; I shall be
had to a justice, and put to Bridewell to beat hemp ; poor
Waitwell 's gone to prison already.

Mrs. Fain. Have a good heart, Foible, Mirabell 's gone to
give security for him. This is all Marwood's and my
husband's doing.

Foib. Yes, yes, I know it, madam ; she was in my lady's
closet, and overheard all that you said to me before
dinner. She sent the letter to my lady ; and that miss-
ing effect, Mr. Fainall laid this plot to arrest Waitwell,
when he pretended to go for the papers ; and in the
meantime Mrs. Marwood declared all to my lady.

Mrs. Fain. Was there no mention made of me in the letter ?
My mother does not suspect my being in the confede-
racy ? I fancy Marwood has not told her, though she
has told my husband.

Foib. Yes, madam ; but my lady did not see that part ; we
stifled the letter before she read so far. Has that mis-
chievous devil told Mr. Fainall of your ladyship, then ?

Mrs. Fain. Ay, all 's out, my affair with Mirabell, every-
thing discovered. This is the last day of our living to-
gether, that 's my comfort.

Foib. Indeed, madam, and so 'tis a comfort if you knew all.
He has been even with your ladyship ; which I could
have told you long enough since, but I love to keep
"peace and quietness by my good will : I had rather bring
friends together than set 'em at distance. But Mrs.

Marwood and he are nearer related than ever their parents thought for.

Mrs. Fain. Sayest thou so, Foible ? Canst thou prove this ?

Foib. I can take my oath of it, madam, so can Mrs. Mincing ; we have had many a fair word from Madam Marwood, to conceal something that passed in our chamber one evening when you were at Hyde Park ;—and we were thought to have gone a-walking : but we went up unawares,—though we were sworn to secrecy too ; Madam Marwood took a book and swore us upon it : but it was a book of poems,—so long as it was not a Bible oath, we may break it with a safe conscience.

Mrs. Fain. This discovery is the most opportune thing I could wish. Now, Mincing ?

Enter Mincing

Minc. My lady would speak with Mrs. Foible, mem. Mr. Mirabell is with her ; he has set your spouse at liberty, Mrs. Foible, and would have you hide yourself in my lady's closet, till my old lady's anger is abated. Oh, my old lady is in a perilous passion at something Mr. Fainall has said : he swears, and my old lady cries. There 's a fearful hurricane, I vow. He says, mem, how that he 'll have my lady's fortune made over to him, or 'll be divorced.

Mrs. Fain. Does your lady or Mirabell know that ?

Minc. Yes, mem, they have sent me to see if Sir Wilful be sober, and to bring him to them. My lady is resolved to have him, I think, rather than lose such a vast sum

as six thousand pounds. Oh, come, Mrs. Foible, I hear my old lady.

Mrs. Fain. Foible, you must tell Mincing that she must prepare to vouch when I call her.

Foib. Yes, yes, madam.

Minc. Oh, yes, mem, I 'll vouch anything for your ladyship's service, be what it will.

[*Exeunt Mincing and Foible.*

Enter Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Marwood

Lady. O my dear friend, how can I enumerate the benefits that I have received from your goodness ? To you I owe the timely discovery of the false vows of Mirabell : to you I owe the detection of the imposter Sir Rowland. And now you are become an intercessor with my son-in-law, to save the honour of my house, and compound for the frailties of my daughter. Well, friend, you are enough to reconcile me to the bad world, or else I would retire to deserts and solitude ; and feed harmless sheep by groves and purling stream. Dear Marwood, let us leave the world, and retire by ourselves and be shepherdesses.

Mrs. Mar. Let us first dispatch the affair in hand, madam. We shall have leisure to think of retirement afterwards. Here is one who is concerned in the treaty.

[*Turning to Mrs. Fainall.*

Lady. Oh, daughter, daughter, is it possible thou shouldst be my child, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, and as I may say, another me, and yet transgress the most minute particle of severe virtue ? Is it possible you should lean aside to iniquity, who have been cast in the direct mould of virtue ? I have not only been a

mould but a pattern for you, and a model for you, after you were brought into the world.

Mrs. Fain. I don't understand your ladyship.

Lady. Not understand ? Why, have you not been naught ? Have you not been sophisticated ? Not understand ? Here I am ruined to compound for your caprices and your cuckoldoms. I must pawn my plate and my jewels, and ruin my niece, and all little enough—

Mrs. Fain. I am wronged and abused, and so are you. 'Tis a false accusation, as false as hell, as false as your friend there, ay, or your friend's friend, my false husband.

Mrs. Mar. My friend, Mrs. Fainall ? Your husband my friend, what do you mean ?

Mrs. Fain. I know what I mean, madam, and so do you, and so shall the world at a time convenient.

Mrs. Mar. I am sorry to see you so passionate, madam. More temper would look more like innocence. But I have done. I am sorry my zeal to serve your ladyship and family should admit of misconstruction, or make me liable to affronts. You will pardon me, madam, if I meddle no more with an affair in which I am not personally concerned.

Lady. Oh, dear friend, I am so ashamed that you should meet with such returns. You ought to ask pardon on your knees, ungrateful creature ; she deserves more from you, than all your life can accomplish. Oh, don't leave me destitute in this perplexity ;—no, stick to me my good genius.

Mrs. Fain. I tell you, madam, you're abused. Stick to you ? ay, like a leech, to suck your best blood—she 'll drop off when she 's full. Madam, you shan't pawn a

bodkin, nor part with a brass counter, in composition for me. I defy 'em all. Let 'em prove their aspersions : I know my own innocence, and dare stand a trial.

[Exit.]

Lady. Why, if she should be innocent, if she should be wronged after all, ha ? I don't know what to think,— and I promise you, her education has been unexceptionable—I may say it : for I chiefly made it my own care to initiate her very infancy in the rudiments of virtue, and to impress upon her tender years a young odium and aversion to the very sight of men. Ay, friend, she would ha' shrieked if she had but seen a man, till she was in her teens. As I 'm a person 'tis true—she was never suffered to play with a male-child though but in coats ; nay, her very babies were of the feminine gender. Oh, she never looked a man in the face but her own father, or the chaplain, and him we made a shift to put upon her for a woman, by the help of his long garments, and his sleek face ; till she was going in her fifteen.

Mrs. Mar. 'Twas much she should be deceived so long.

Lady. I warrant you, or she would never have borne to have been catechized by him ; and have heard his long lectures against singing and dancing, and such debaucheries ; and going to filthy plays ; and profane music-meetings, where the lewd trebles squeak nothing but bawdy, and the basses roar blasphemy. Oh, she would have swooned at the sight or name of an obscene play-book—and can I think after all this, that my daughter can be naught ? What, a whore ? And thought it excommunication to set her foot within the door of a

play-house. Oh, dear friend, I can't believe it, no nor ; as she says, let him prove it, let him prove it.

Mrs. Mar. Prove it, madam ? What, and have your name prostituted in a public court ; yours and your daughter's reputation worried at the bar by a pack of bawling lawyers ? To be ushered in which an *O yes* of scandal ; and have your case opened by an old fumbling lecher in a quoil like a man midwife, to bring your daughter's infamy to light ; to be a theme for legal punsters, and quibblers by the statute : and become a jest, against a rule of court, where there is no precedent for a jest in any record ; not even in Doomsday Book : to discompose the gravity of the bench, and provoke naughty interrogatories in more naughty Law Latin ; while the good judge, tickled with the proceeding, simpers under a grey beard, and fidgets off and on his cushion as if he had swallowed cantharides, or sat upon cow-itc.

Lady. Oh, 'tis very hard !

Mrs. Mar. And then to have my young revellers of the Temple take notes, like prentices at a conventicle ; and after talk it over again in Commons, or before drawers in an eating-house.

Lady. Worse and worse.

Mrs. Mar. Nay, this is nothing ; if it would end here 'twere well. But it must after this be consigned by the short-hand writers to the public press ; and from thence be transferred to the hands, nay, into the throats and lungs of hawkers, with voices more licentious than the loud flounder-man's : and this you must hear till you are stunned ; nay, you must hear nothing else for some days.

Lady. Oh, 'tis insupportable. No, no, dear friend, make it up, make it up ; ay, ay, I 'll compound. I 'll give up all, myself and my all, my niece and her all—anything, everything for composition.

Mrs. Mar. Nay, madam, I advise nothing, I only lay before you, as a friend, the inconveniences which perhaps you have overseen. Here comes Mr. Fainall, if he will be satisfied to huddle up all in silence, I shall be glad. You must think I would rather congratulate than console with you.

Enter Fainall

Lady. Ay, ay, I do not doubt it, dear Marwood : no, no, I do not doubt it.

Fain. Well, madam ; I have suffered myself to be overcome by the importunity of this lady your friend ; and am content you shall enjoy your own proper estate during life ; on condition you oblige yourself never to marry, under such penalty as I think convenient.

Lady. Never to marry ?

Fain. No more Sir Rowland. The next imposture may not be so timely detected.

Mrs. Mar. That condition, I dare answer, my lady will consent to, without difficulty ; she has already but too much experienced the perfidiousness of men. Besides, madam, when we retire to our pastoral solitude we shall bid adieu to all other thoughts.

Lady. Ay, that 's true but in case of necessity ; as of health, or some such emergency—

Fain. Oh, if you are prescribed marriage, you shall be considered ; I will only reserve to myself the power to choose for you. If your physic be wholesome, it matters

not who is your apothecary. Next, my wife shall settle on me the remainder of her fortune, not made over already ; and for her maintenance depend entirely on my discretion.

Lady. This is most inhumanly savage ; exceeding the barbarity of a Muscovite husband.

Fain. I learned it from his Czarish Majesty's retinue, in a winter evening's conference over brandy and pepper, amongst other secrets of matrimony and policy, as they are at present practised in the northern hemisphere. But this must be agreed unto, and that positively. Lastly, I will be endowed, in right of my wife, with that six thousand pounds which is the moiety of Mrs. Millamant's fortune in your possession ; and which she has forfeited (as will appear by the last will and testament of your deceased husband, Sir Jonathan Wishfort) by her disobedience in contracting herself against your consent or knowledge ; and by refusing the offered match with Sir Wilful Witwoud, which, you, like a careful aunt, had provided for her.

Lady. My nephew was *non compos* : and could not make his addresses.

Fain. I come to make demands—I 'll hear no objections.

Lady. You will grant me time to consider ?

Fain. Yes, while the instrument is drawing, to which you must set your hand till more sufficient deeds can be perfected : which I will take care shall be done with all possible speed. In the meanwhile I will go for the said instrument, and till my return you may balance this matter in your own discretion. [Exit.

Lady This insolence is beyond all precedent, all parallel ; must I be subject to this merciless villain ?

Mrs. Mar. 'Tis severe indeed, madam, that you should smart for your daughter's wantonness.

Lady. 'Twas against my consent that she married this barbarian, but she would have him, though her year was not out. Ah ! her first husband, my son Languish, would not have carried it thus. Well that was my choice, this is hers ; she is matched now with a witness. —I shall be mad, dear friend, is there no comfort for me ? Must I live to be confiscated at this rebel-rate ? —Here come two more of my Egyptain plagues too.

Enter Millamant and Sir Wiful

Sir Wil. Aunt, your servant.

Lady. Out, caterpillar, call not me aunt ; I know thee not.

Sir Wil. I confess I have been a little in disguise, as they say. 'Sheart ! and I 'm sorry for 't. What would you have ? I hope I committed no offence, aunt, and if I did I am willing to make satisfaction ; and what can a man say fairer ? If I have broke anything I 'll pay for 't, an it cost a pound. And so let that content for what 's past, and make no more words. For what 's to come, to pleasure you I 'm willing to marry my cousin. So pray let 's all be friends, she and I are agreed upon the matter before a witness.

Lady. How 's this, dear niece ? Have I any comfort ? Can this be true ?

Milla. I am content to be a sacrifice to your repose, madam ; and to convince you that I had no hand in the plot, as you were misinformed, I have laid my commands on Mirabell to come in person, and be a witness that I give my hand to this flower of knighthood ; and for the contract that passed between Mirabell and me,

I have obliged him to make a resignation of it in your ladyship's presence. He is without, and waits your leave for admittance.

Lady. Well, I 'll swear I am something revived at this testimony of your obedience ; but I cannot admit that traitor. I fear I cannot fortify myself to support his appearance. He is as terrible to me as a Gorgon ; if I see him I fear I shall turn to stone, petrify incessantly.

Milla. If you disoblige him he may resent your refusal, and insist upon the contract still. Then 'tis the last time he will be offensive to you.

Lady. Are you sure it will be the last time ? If I were sure of that—shall I never see him again ?

Milla. Sir Wilful, you and he are to travel together, are you not ?

Sir Wil. 'Sheart, the gentleman 's a civil gentleman, aunt, let him come in ; why, we 're sworn brothers and fellow-travellers. We are to be Pylades and Orestes, he and I—he is to be my interpreter in foreign parts. He has been overseas once already ; and with proviso that I marry my cousin, will cross 'em once again, only to bear me company. 'Sheart, I 'll call him in. An I set on 't once, he shall come in ; and see who 'll hinder him. [Goes to the door and hems]

Mrs. Mar. This is precious fooling, if it would pass ; but I 'll know the bottom of it.

Lady. Oh, dear Marwood, you are not going ?

Mrs. Mar. Not far, madam ; I 'll return immediately.

[Exit.]

Re-enter Sir Wilful and Mirabell

Sir Wil. Look up, man, I 'll stand by you, 'sbud, an she do frown, she can't kill you. Besides, harkee, she dare

not frown desperately, because her face is none of her own ; 'sheart, an she should, her forehead would wrinkle like the coat of a cream-cheese ; but mum for that, fellow-traveller.

Mira. If a deep sense of the many injuries I have offered to so good a lady, with a sincere remorse, and a hearty contrition, can but obtain the least glance of compassion, I am too happy. Ah, madam, there was a time—but let it be forgotten—I confess I have deservedly forfeited the high place I once held, of sighing at your feet. Nay, kill me not, by turning from me in disdain. I come not to plead for favour, nay, not for pardon ; I am a suppliant only for pity—I am going where I never shall behold you more.

Sir Wil. How, fellow-traveller !—You shall go by yourself then.

Mira. Let me be pitied first ; and afterwards forgotten—I ask no more.

Sir Wil. By our Lady, a very reasonable request, and will cost you nothing, aunt. Come, come, forgive and forget, aunt, why you must an you are a Christian.

Mira. Consider, madam, in reality, you could not receive much prejudice ; it was an innocent device ; though I confess it had a face of guiltiness—it was at most an artifice which love contrived—and errors which love produces have ever been accounted venial. At least think it is punishment enough, that I have lost what in my heart I hold most dear, that to your cruel indignation I have offered up this beauty, and with her my peace and quiet ; nay, all my hopes of future comfort.

Sir Wil. An he does not move me, would I may never be of the quorum. An it were not as good a deed as to

drink, to give her to him again, I would I might never take shipping. Aunt, if you don't forgive quickly, I shall melt, I can tell you that. My contract went no farther than a little mouth-glue, and that 's hardly dry ; —one doleful sigh more from my fellow-traveller and 'tis dissolved.

Lady. Well, nephew, upon your account. Ah, he has a false insinuating tongue. Well, sir, I will stifle my just resentment at my nephew's request. I will endeavour what I can to forget, but on proviso that you resign the contract with my niece immediately.

Mira. It is in writing and with papers of concern ; but I have sent my servant for it, and will deliver it to you, with all acknowledgments for your transcendent goodness.

Lady. Oh, he has witchcraft in his eyes and tongue ; when I did not see him I could have bribed a villain to his assassination ; but his appearance rakes the embers which have so long lain smothered in my breast.— [Aside]

Enter Fainall and Mrs. Marwood

Fain. Your date of deliberation, madam, is expired. Here is the instrument, are you prepared to sign ?

Lady. If I were prepared, I am not empowered. My niece exerts a lawful claim, having matched herself by my direction to Sir Wilful.

Fain. That sham is too gross to pass on me, though 'tis imposed on you madam.

Milla. Sir, I have given my consent.

Mira. And, sir, I have resigned my pretensions.

Sir Wil. And, sir, I assert my right ; and will maintain it in defiance of you, sir, and of your instrument. 'Sheart an you talk of an instrument, sir, I have an old fox by my thigh shall hack your instrument of ram vellum to shreds,

sir. It shall not be sufficient for a Mittimus or a tailor's measure ; therefore withdraw your instrument, sir, or by our Lady I shall draw mine.

Lady. Hold, nephew, hold.

Milla. Good Sir Wilful, respite your valour.

Fain. Indeed ? Are you provided of your guard, with your single beef-eater there ? But I 'm prepared for you, and insist upon my first proposal. You shall submit your own estate to my management, and absolutely make over my wife's to my sole use ; as pursuant to the purport and tenor of this other covenant. I suppose, madam, your consent is not requisite in this case ; nor, Mr. Mirabell, your resignation ; nor, Sir Wilful, your right. You may draw your fox if you please, sir, and make a bear-garden flourish somewhere else : for here it will not avail. This, my Lady Wishfort, must be subscribed, or your darling daughter's turned adrift, like a leaky bulk to sink or swim, as she and the current of this lewd town can agree.

Lady. Is there no means, no remedy, to stop my ruin ? Ungrateful wretch ! dost thou not owe thy being, thy subsistence, to my daughter's fortune ?

Fain. I 'll answer you when I have the rest of it in my possession.

Mira. But that you would not accept of a remedy from my hands.—I own I have not deserved you should owe any obligation to me ; or else perhaps I could advise—

Lady. Oh, what ? what ? to save me and my child from ruin, from want, I 'll forgive all that 's past ; nay, I 'll consent to anything to come, to be delivered from this tyranny.

Mira. Ay, madam, but that is too late, my reward is inter-

cepted. You have disposed of her, who only could have made me a compensation for all my services ;—but be it as it may, I am resolved I 'll serve you, you shall not be wronged in this savage manner.

Lady. How ! Dear Mr. Mirabell, can you be so generous at last ! But it is not possible. Harkee, I 'll break my nephew's match, you shall have my niece yet, and all her fortune, if you can but save me from this imminent danger.

Mira. Will you ? I take you at your word. I ask no more. I must have leave for two criminals to appear.

Lady. Ay, ay, anybody, anybody.

Mira. Foible is one, and a penitent.

Enter Mrs. Fainall, Foible, and Mincing

[Mirabell and Lady Wishfort go to Mrs. Fainall and Foible]

Mrs. Mar. Oh, my shame ! these corrupt things are brought hither to expose me. *[To Fainall]*

Fain. If it must all come out, why let 'em know it, 'tis but the Way of the World. That shall not urge me to relinquish or abate one title of my terms, no, I will insist the more.

Foib. Yes, indeed, madam, I 'll take my Bible oath of it.

Minc. And so will I, mem.

Lady. O Marwood, Marwood, are thou false ? my friend deceive me ? Hast thou been a wicked accomplice with that profligate man ?

Mrs. Mar. Have you so much ingratitude and injustice, to give credit against your friend, to the aspersions of two such mercenary trulls ?

Foib. Mercenary, mem ? I scorn your words 'Tis true we found you and Mr. Fainall in the blue garret : by the

same token, you swore us to secrecy upon Messalina's poems. Mercenary? No, if we would have been mercenary, we should have held our tongues; you would have bribed us sufficiently.

Fain. Go, you are an insignificant thing. Well, what are you the better for this! Is this Mr. Mirabell's expedient? I'll be put off no longer. You thing, that was a wife, shall smart for this. I will not leave thee where-withal to hide thy shame: your body shall be naked as your reputation.

Mrs. Fain. I despise you, and defy your malice. You have aspersed me wrongfully. I have proved your falsehood. Go, you and your treacherous—I will not name it, but starve together,—perish!

Fain. Not while you are worth a great, indeed, my dear. Madam, I'll be fooled no longer.

Lady. Ah, Mr. Mirabell, this is small comfort, the detection of this affair.

Mira. Oh, in good time. Your leave for the other offender and penitent to appear, madam.

Enter Waitwell with a box of writings

Lady. O Sir Rowland! Well, rascal?

Wait. What your ladyship pleases.—I have brought the black box at last, madam.

Mira. Give it me. Madam, you remember your promise.

Lady. Ay, dear sir.

Mira. Where are the gentlemen?

Wait. At hand, sir, rubbing their eyes, just risen from sleep.

Fain. 'Sdeath, what's this to me? I'll not wait your private concerns.

Enter Petulant and Witwood

Pet. How now ? what 's the matter ? whose hand 's out ?

Wit. Hey-day ! what, are you all got together ; like players at the end of the last act ?

Mira. You may remember, gentlemen. I once requested your hands as witnesses to a certain parchment.

Wit. Ay, I do, my hand I remember. Petulant set his mark.

Mira. You wrong him, his name is fairly written, as shall appear. You do not remember, gentlemen, anything of what that parchment contained ?

[*Undoing the box.*

Wit. No.

Pet. Not I. I writ, I read nothing.

Mira. Very well, now you shall know. Madam, your promise.

Lady. Ay, ay, sir, upon my honour.

Mira. Mr. Fainall, it is now time that you should know that your lady, while she was at her own disposal, and before you had by your insinuations wheedled her out of a pretended settlement of the greatest part of her fortune—

Fain. Sir ! pretended !

Mira. Yes, sir. I say that this lady while a widow, having, it seems, received some cautions respecting your inconstancy and tyranny of temper, which from her own partial opinion and fondness of you she could never have suspected—she did, I say, by the wholesome advice of friends and of sages learned in the laws of this land, deliver this same as her act and deed to me in trust, and to the uses within mentioned. You may read if you

please—[Holding out the parchment] though perhaps what is written on the back may serve your occasions.

Fain. Very likely, sir. What 's here ? Damnation ! [Reads.]
A Deed of Conveyance of the whole Estate real of Arabella Languish, Widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell.—Confusion !

Mira. Even so, sir, 'tis the Way of the World, sir, of the widows of the world. I suppose this deed may bear an elder date than what you have obtained from your lady.

Fain. Perfidious fiend ! then thus I 'll be revenged—

[Offers to run at Mrs. Fainall]

Sir Wil. Hold, sir, now you may make your bear-garden flourish somewhere else, sir.

Fain. Mirabell, you shall hear of this, sir, be sure you shall.

—Let me pass, oaf. [Exit.]

Mrs. Fain. Madam, you seem to stifle your resentment ; you had better give it vent.

Mrs. Mar. Yes, it shall have vent—and to your confusion, or I 'll perish in the attempt. [Exit.]

Lady. Oh, daughter, daughter, 'tis plain thou hast inherited thy mother's prudence.

Mrs. Fain. Thank Mr. Mirabell, a cautious friend, to whose advice all is owing.

Lady. Well, Mr. Mirabell, you have kept your promise—and I must perform mine. First I pardon for your sake Sir Rowland there and Foible. The next thing is to break the matter to my nephew, and how to do that—

Mira. For that, madam, give yourself no trouble. Let me have your consent. Sir Wilful is my friend ; he has had compassion upon lovers, and generously engaged a volunteer in this action, for our service ; and now designs to prosecute his travels.

Sir Wil. 'Sheart, aunt, I have no mind to marry. My cousin 's a fine lady, and the gentleman loves her, and she loves him, and they deserve one another ; my resolution is to see foreign parts—I have set on 't—and when I 'm set on 't, I must do 't. And if these two gentlemen would travel too, I think they may be spared.

Pet. For my part, I say little. I think things are best off or on.

Wit. Egad, I understand nothing of the matter. I 'm in a maze yet, like a dog in a dancing-school.

Lady. Well, sir, take her, and with her all the joy I can give you.

Milla. Why does not the man take me ? Would you have me give myself to you over again ?

Mira. Ay, and over and over again.—[*kisses her hand.*] I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, Heaven grant I love you not too well, that 's all my fear.

Sir Wil. 'Sheart, you 'll have time enough to toy after you 're married ; or if you will toy now, let us have a dance in the meantime ; that we who are not lovers may have some other employment, besides looking on.

Mira. With all my heart, dear Sir Wilful. What shall we do for music ?

Foib. Oh, sir, some that were provided for Sir Rowland's entertainment are yet within call. [A dance]

Lady. As I am a person, I can hold out no longer. I have wasted my spirits so to-day already, that I am ready to sink under the fatigue ; and I cannot but have some fears upon me yet, that my son Fainall will pursue some desperate course.

Mira. Madam, disquiet not yourself on that account ; to my knowledge his circumstances are such, he must of force comply. For my part, I will contribute all that in me lies to a reunion ; in the meantime, madam [*To Mrs. Fainall*], let me before these witnesses restore to you this deed of trust ; it may be a means, well managed, to make you live easily together.

From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed :
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed :
For each deceiver to his cost may find,
That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

EPILOGUE

After our epilogue this crowd dismisses,
I 'm thinking how this play 'll be pulled to pieces.
But pray consider, ere you doom its fall,
How hard a thing 'twould be, to please you all.
There are some critics so with spleen diseased,
They scarcely come inclining to be pleased :
And sure he must have more than mortal skill,
Who pleases any one against his will.
Then, all bad poets we are sure foes,
And how their number 's swelled the town well knows
In shoals, I 've marked 'em judging in the pit ;
Though they 're on no pretence for judgment fit,
But that they have been damned for want of wit.
Since when, they by their own offences taught,
Set up for spies on plays, and finding fault.
Others there are whose malice we 'd prevent ;
Such, who watch plays, with scurrilous intent
To mark out who by characters are meant.
And though no perfect likeness they can trace,
Yet each pretends to know the copied face.
These, with false glosses feed their own ill-nature,
And turn to libel, what was meant a satire.
May such malicious fops this fortune find,
To think themselves alone the fools designed ;
If any are so arrogantly vain,
To think they singly can support a scene,
And furnish fool enough to entertain.
For well the learned and the judicious know,

That satire scorns to stoop so meanly low,
As any one abstracted fop to show.
For, as when painters form a matchless face,
They from each fair one catch some different grace
And shining features in one portrait blend,
To which no single beauty must pretend.
So poets oft, do in one piece expose
Whole *belles assemblies* of coquettes and beaux.

NOTES

Dedication

Ralph Earl of Montague—patron of arts and letters.

Arraign—accuse.

Incur the imputation of too much sufficiency—lay myself open to the charge of exaggerated consciousness of my own worth.

Censure—judgment.

Security—conviction.

Page 2

Reflecting part—thoughtful section.

Natural folly—i.e. those who are fools by nature, or idiots, are not subjects for comedy, for they cannot improve by ridicule or satire. Only those who are pretentious and affect wit (like Witwoud) are fit subjects of comedy, for satire would make such persons correct their ways.

Let fly their censure—hastily condemn.

Witwoud—a character in *The Way of the World*.

Truewit—a character in *The Silent Woman* by Ben Jonson.

Countenance—support.

Prostituted—misused.

Terence—a comic dramatist of ancient Rome (190–159 B.C.)

Scipio and Lelius—Roman aristocrats, who patronised literature.

Page 3

Plautus—another comic dramatist of ancient Rome (245–184 B.C.)

Menander—a comic dramatist of ancient Greece (342–291 B.C.)

Theophrastus—a Greek philosopher, pupil of Aristotle.

Aristotle—Greek philosopher (384–322 B.C.)

Page 4

Where there were so many, not inferior either to a Scipio *Terence*—(Congreve's modest depreciation of himself). Earl Ralph and his friends were not inferior to Scipio or Lelius, but he, Congreve, was so much inferior to Terence.

Resigned her birthright—as the earliest of all arts, poetry should have been the first to 'pay her duty' to the Earl—but she did not.

Extraction—birth. *Others of a later extraction*—architecture and painting, which flourished later than poetry.

Prepossess—occupy beforehand.

Propitious—favourably disposed.

Consecrate—dedicate.

Prologue

With ill stars are cursed—are cursed with bad luck.

Scribbling fools—foolish writers.

Oaf—idiot child. *Nature's oafs*—natural fools; idiots.

Her own nest—i.e. fortune's own nest. *She broods*—fortune broods.

Cuckoo eggs—the cuckoo leaves her eggs in the nest of a crow, which mistaking the eggs of the cuckoo as her own, hatches them. The cuckoo is a foolish bird and cannot hatch her own eggs—so fortune helps her.

Changeling—substitute. —[Literally, a changeling is the child which fairies were supposed to leave in a cradle. When a handsome child was born, it was believed that the

fairies stole that child and left an ugly one in its place in the cradle.]

No portion of her own—fortune does not care for her own children (*viz.* scribbling fools, whom she herself has made), but adopts and loves Nature's neglected children.

Adopted care—cuckoo's egg left in the nest of the crow.

Bubbles—because the reputation of a poet lasts for a short time.

Act I

The plot of *The Way of the World* is complicated. There are wheels within wheels in the plot, though it centres round one theme—*viz.* the love of Mirabell and Millamant. All characters in the play are concerned, directly or indirectly, with the love of Mirabell and Millamant. Some help them, and others are hostile to them. The intrigues and counter-intrigues of the two groups of characters constitute the interest of the play.

The first act gives the Exposition of the plot. The dialogue between Mirabell and Fainall discloses two facts : (i) Mirabell is in love with Millamant and wants to marry her. (ii) Lady Wishfort, aunt of Millamant, is angry with Mirabell, because he had falsely pretended love to her to conceal his love for Millamant, and so Lady Wishfort does all she can to prevent this marriage. And Millamant cannot marry Mirabell without her aunt's approval, for if she does, she will lose half her fortune.

Mirabell has devised a clever plan to secure the consent of Lady Wishfort to his marriage with Millamant. Lady Wishfort, though an old widow of fifty-five, desires to marry again, and it is on this weakness of Lady Wishfort that Mirabell plays to gain his end.

It is reported that Sir Rowland, the rich uncle of Mirabell, has come to town and that Mirabell is not on good terms with his uncle. [It may be mentioned here that it is Mirabell who has got this report circulated as a sort of bait for Lady Wishfort, and Lady Wishfort, it will be seen, easily takes this bait.]

We learn also that Waitwell the servant of Mirabell is married to Foible, the maid servant of Lady Wishfort.

The two fools, Witwoud and Petulant, do not serve any purpose in the plot of the play, but help to throw light on the 'manners' of the society presented in the play.

Thus the ground is prepared for the main intrigue of the play—viz., to practise deception upon Lady Wishfort by making Waitwell personate Sir Rowland.

Page 9

Fortunate—i.e. you have been winning all along.

Done—finished.

The coldness of a losing gamester.....winner—when a loser in a game is indifferent to his loss, the winner does not enjoy his victory.

Millamant—heroine of the play, whom Mirabell loves. *Humours*—moods. *Stoic*—a person of great self-control; philosopher of the school founded by Zeno, who held that virtue was the highest good and who would not allow the mind to be ruffled by pleasure or pain. *Coxcomb*—fool.

Page 10

Lady Wishfort—aunt of Millamant and 'enemy to Mirabell'. *Passion*—anger, because Mirabell had falsely pretended love to her.

Vapours—depression of spirit.

Traciturnity—reserve; silence. *Long visits*—referring to Mirabell's long waiting there.

Resignation--submission to her aunt.

Half her fortune--this is an important point in the story. Millamant would lose half her inheritance if she were to marry without her aunt's approval.

Less discreet--not so prudent as to comply with her aunt. [Millamant was a practical-minded lady and would not displease her aunt.]

Page 11

Cabal-nights--nights, in which the ladies would meet in privacy, and talk scandals. *Cabal*--a secret party or clique. *Corner's inquest*--inquiry held by the corner's court as to cause of death by violence or accident. [So the ladies meet on cabal-nights to pass their judgment on the murdered reputation of a man or a woman]. *One man*--at least one man should be taken in as a member of the 'cabal'.

Ratafia--a kind of drink ; liqueur flavoured with fruits (like peach and cherry).

This separation--i.e. hostile attitude towards you. *Dissembled*--concealed your real feeling ; that is, if Mirabell could deceive her successfully, she would not have turned against him.

Grown fat--big with child ; pregnant.

Drospy--a disease, in which there is accumulation of fluid in the body.

To be in labour--about to give birth to a child.

Page 12

The discovery of this amour--the discovery of Mirabell's love for Millamant.

Advances--i.e. advances (of love).

Omissions of that nature--i.e. a man's rejection of a woman's advance (of love).

Coxcombs—vain fools.

Interpret a woman's good manners to her prejudice—think that a woman's politeness is only an attempt to attract a man.

Think that she who does not refuse—think that because a woman is polite and obliging, she is quite willing to be embraced by a man.

Too much generosity not to be tender of her honour—i.e. you are generous enough to see that her honour does not suffer.

Affected—pretended. (You pretend to be indifferent about Mrs. Marwood, but you are not really indifferent; you know that she had made deliberate advances to you and that you have rejected these advances.)

Confesses—shows.

Conscious of a concern—you seem to be more concerned (anxious) about Mrs. Marwood than about your wife.

Censorious—fault-finding; critical.

Page 13

Canonical hour—time for prayer or for celebration of marriage from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Probably the hours were formerly up to 12 noon.)

Turned of the last canonical hour—past 12 noon.

Pertinently—to the point. *Jade*—woman.

Grand affair—humorously referring to marriage between Waitwell and Foible.

Something tedious—rather late.

Coupling—marriage (at the church of St. Pancras).

To lead up—i.e. to lead to the altar for marriage.

Dispatch—quick performance of the marriage.

Duke's Palace—church in Aldgate (Duke's Palace).

Riveted—united in wedlock. *In a trice*—in a moment.

Adjourn—postpone.

Shake his ears—get up.

Dame Partlet—refers to Foible. Partlet—a hen from its habit of ruffling the feathers round its neck. The expression ‘Dame Partlet’ is applied to women.

Page 14

Rustle up her feathers—get ready.

As you tender your ears—if you are careful about your ears (*i.e.* if you let out this secret, I shall box your ears).

One reason—viz. to use the fool as a cover to hide her love affair.

Complaisance—politeness.

Page 15

Discerning—watchful.

Took her to pieces—analysed her character, noting all her weaknesses.

Sifted her—separated her virtues from her faults.

Got them by rote—committed them to memory.

My life on it—I am sure.

You are your own man again—you are your own self; you will not remain a slave to her charms.

Page 16

To equip himself—*i.e.* to acquaint himself with the ways of fashionable life, before he starts on his travel.

Credit—reputation. *Exportation*—sending abroad.

Page 17

A little loss—*i.e.* of credit.

Quite eaten up—completely ruined.

With being overstocked—with having too many fools in our country. It is better to send some fools out and suffer

a slight loss of reputation than to ruin our own country by having too many fools.]

Knight Errant—wandering knight—Sir Wilful.

Are anything related—are they of the same kind?

Grows by—has the same relation to the Knight (Sir Wilful).

Medlar—a fruit, like the apple, which is eaten when decayed.

Crab—crab-apple, which is sour to the taste.

One will melt in your mouth—the medlar is a fruit (like apple) that rots before it ripens; so it is soft, and when eaten it melts in the mouth. *The other sets your teeth*—the crab (a kind of wild apple) is sour and sets the teeth on edge. [The idea is that Sir Wilful is obstinate, while Witwoud is obliging and obsequious.]

The monster in the Tempest—Caliban.

The other—Witwoud, the younger brother.

Is not exceptionis—does not take offence.

Construe an affront—takes an insult as a sort of joke.

Raillery—mockery.

Page 18

Panegyric—eulogy; extravagant praise (of the dead person).

Epistle dedicatory—a letter dedicating a book to a patron; the letter is soon followed by the author himself, who appears in person to beg for pecuniary help. [The letter of Sir Wilful is an indication that he will soon come in person.]

Half a fool—the implication is that Witwoud is a complete fool.

Le drole—a good joke. *Gad*—God.

Page 19

Judgment—opinion. *Such a memory*—such a bad memory.

Since you monopolise the wit—since you have more wit, you should not grudge him his good fortune at gambling.

Page 20

Breed debates—cause quarrels between Petulant and me.
Faith and troth—in truth. *If he had any judgment*—i.e. he has no judgment, and is therefore contemptible.

Over-nicely bred—brought up in good manners.

Bum-bailey—the agent of a bailiff, who is generally rude and unmannerly.

Page 21

What if he be—supposing he were insincere.

A decay of parts—deficiency of wit or understanding.

Positive—sticking obstinately to his opinion.

Natural parts—natural qualities (as opposed to those acquired by education); there is a hint at the other meaning of ‘natural’ (foolish).

Page 22

Strumpet—prostitute.

Trulls—degraded women.

Page 23

Whip he was gone—suddenly he vanished. *In a trice*—in a moment.

'Sbud—an oath. *All's one*—don't mind.

Page 24

Condition—high rank. *Condition's a dried fig*—I don't care for condition.

Your what-dee-call-'ems—yout what-do-you-call-them's. (Petulant does not find the right word). *Rub off*—get away.

Roxalanas—queens. Roxalana was the wife of Solyman the Magnificent in Davenant's opera, *The Siege of Rhodes*.

Cry you mercy—thank you. *Caterwauling*—quarrelling like cats. *Conventicle*—religious meetings.

Trundle—roll along. *Continence*—restraint.

Page 25

Snug 's the word—I would prefer to remain quiet.

Page 26

Raillery—mockery.

Whiting—a sea-fish. *Mercury*—a planet (nearest to the sun).

You had died for her—you were in love with her.

Page 27

Demme—damnm, an oath.

At some distance—not on good terms. *Quaker*—a member of the Society of Friends, devoted to peace principles, plainness of dress, simplicity of speech and priestless religious meetings. *Fobbed*—cheated.

Items of such a treaty—there is a vague rumour of a marriage (*treaty*), which, if it were to materialise, would hit Mirabell hard.

A kind of humorist—a woman of moods.

Page 28

Tete-a-tete—in private conversation.

Malicious—critical ; fault-finding.

Severe—critical ; we shall be severe in our judgments of others. *Putting the ladies out of countenance*—making the ladies blush (out of shame).

Page 29

Ribaldry—indecent remarks.

Act II

The plot of the play advances, though rather slowly. In fact, the slow movement of the action is a weakness of the play. There is too much talk, brilliant no doubt by virtue of its wit,—but the glitter of wit is no compensation for the deficiency of construction.

The device of Mirabell is made clear in this scene. Waitwell is to represent the pretended uncle of Mirabell and court Lady Wishfort. She is so eager to marry, that she will immediately accept Waitwell. When she makes a contract of marriage, Mirabell will appear upon the scene and discover the imposture and release her on condition that she consents to his marriage with Millamant. This is the first and main intrigue of the play.

There is a counter-intrigue—that of Fainall to secure the fortune of his mother-in-law, Lady Wishfort, and that of Millamant. He loves Mrs. Marwood, and hates his wife, who is a friend of Mirabell. The counter-intrigue is made clear later in the play.

Millamant first makes her appearance in this scene. She is a handsome and graceful lady, full of intelligence and wit. Her entrance into the stage is thus described by Mirabell :

'Here she comes i' faith full sail, with her fan spread and streamers out.'

She is in love with Mirabell, but cannot marry him till she obtains the consent of her aunt, Lady Wishfort. She knows of Mirabell's plan to deceive the old Lady, and waits to see how it prosters.

The plan of Mirabell is ready to be put in operation. Waitwell is to disguise himself and personate the rich old uncle of Mirabell, while Foible is to report to the old lady that Sir Rowland has seen her picture and is enamoured of her beauty, and that he is impatient "to lie at her ladyship's feet and worship the original." The plan bids fair to succeed. But Foible notices Mrs. Marwood passing that way. She is sure to report to Lady Wishfort shat she has seen Foible with Mirabell. Thus, already an obstacle is indicated in the execution of Mirabell's plan.

The two intrigues—that of Mirabell (aided by Mrs. Fainall) and that of Mr. Fainall (aided by Mrs. Marwood)—and the manner in which they clash—constitute the plot of *The Way of the World*.

Page 30

Fire—passion.

The man should outlive—a man should live after his love has grown cold. (It would be very good, Mrs. Marwood means, if love and life should end at the same time.)

It is better to be left—

cf. 'It is better to have loved and lost,

Than never to have loved at all.' (Tennyson).

Preposterous—absurd.

My youth may wear . . . possession—I may lose my youth and beauty as I grow old, but so long as I possess youth, I shall not cease to enjoy all the pleasures it offers.

Dissemble—pretend.

In compliance to my mother's humour—in order to flatter my mother.

Page 31

To be free—to speak frankly.

Dote—love fondly. *It is not in our nature*—what Mrs. Marwood means is that, apart from men, women cannot enjoy life.

Libertine—a man of loose character.

You see my friendship—my frankness shows that I regard you as my true friend.

Transcendently—exceedingly.

Vipers—snakes. *Done hating them*—finished hating them.

Despise—treat them with contempt.

Page 32

Penthesilea—queen of the Amazons (women warriors); a masterful woman, who triumphs over men.

Do myself the violence—marry even against my inclination.

Cuckold—a husband, whose wife is unfaithful.

Make him a cuckold—by committing adultery.

Rack—an instrument of torture.

You change colour—you blush! (Mrs. Marwood secretly loves Mirabell.)

Page 33

You have laid a fault acquit him—Mirabell is absolutely free from this fault—viz. pride.

Mortification—pain. *Effect of my concern*—the remark I made on account of my anxiety about your health.

In a pleasant relation—i.e., while you were telling an interesting story. *Fain*—gladly.

Page 34

Censorious—critical; fault-finding. *More prevailing*—stronger.

Will willingly dispense—will not mind if he does not hear the story.

Must put an end to all my hopes—my one and only hope is to get rid of my wife; if that hope is accomplished, I would have nothing to live for;—hence I would be a miserable man.

Weep like Alexander—Alexander (356–323 B.C.) wept because he had no more world to conquer.

Intimate—suggest. *Fellow-feeling*—love.

Page 35

Your mutual jealousies—you both love Mirabell—hence both of you are jealous of each other.

Have both struck fire—have both grown excited and passionate. *Warm confession*—warmth of love shown in your blushes.

Oversee—overlook. *Gross advances*—of love.

The nodding husband.....slept—(a fine example of antithesis—which is a feature of Congreve's brilliant style); even though as husband I shut my eye to my wife's love for Mirabell, I could not, as your lover, fail to notice your affection for him. The husband could sleep, but the lover watched.

Page 36

Your resentment follows his neglect—you are angry with him because he neglects you.

To undeceive the credulous aunt—to tell Lady Wishfort that Mirabell only pretended to love her, but really loved Millamant. *Credulous*—because she believed in the pretended addresses of Mirabell.

Guilt—my falseness to my friend Mrs. Fainall. *Merit*—my fidelity to you.

Vicious—false to my friend.

Page 37

Strictest ties—of friendship.

Indigent of wealth—poor. *Bankrupt in honour*—devoid of honour.

Incensed—enraged.

Page 38

Moiety—half. *Death*—an oath. *Fettered*—chained to wife.

Constitution—i.e., healthy constitution; physical health. *Heart of proof*—heart insensitive to the pangs of jealousy. [I have good health, and my mind is not tortured by jealousy, caused by wife's faithlessness, and as I do not allow my mind to be disturbed by any feeling of jealousy, I hope to live long.]

Dissembling—pretence.

Page 39

Extravagance—this is too much; you are carrying things to the extreme.

Mask—masks were then in vogue among fashionable ladies.

He is too offensive—I cannot bear the sight of him.

With indiscretion—unwisely.

Page 40

Without bounds—without any limit; too much.

Aversion—hatred.

Consequence—i.e., pregnancy. *Apprehensive*—afraid.

With credit—without any scandal. *Lavish of his morals*—lax in his morals.

Professing friend—one who merely pretends to be a friend. *Designing*—scheming.

Reputation—reputation for wit. *Suffered*—allowed.

To make that woman....addresses—Fainall is known to be a man of brilliant wit and charming manners, and so if a woman were unable to resist his charm and wit, people

would not blame her. *A better man.....occasion*—I would not foist a pregnant woman upon a better man, but I did not feel any scruple with regard to Fainall. *Answered to the purpose*—suited the occasion. A worse man would not be suitable, because then you would not escape censure.

Page 41

Mosca in the Fox—Volpone or Fox is a comedy of Ben Jonson. [Volpone, a rich man without children, pretends to be dying, in order to draw gifts from his would-be heirs. Mosca, his parasite and confederate, persuades each of these that he is to be the heir, and thus extracts costly gifts from them. Volpone then makes over his property by will to Mosca, and pretends to be dead. Mosca takes advantage of the situation to blackmail Volpone. In the end, the whole plot is exposed, and Volpone and Mosca are punished.] Mirabell saw to it that Waitwell was already a married man, so that he might not double-cross his master.

Imposture—deception. *Gallant*—(here) Waitwell.

She might.....carry it more privately—Lady Wishfort might seem to carry on her affair with Mirabell's uncle secretly.

No more than.....napkin—i.e., than a mere butler.

Page 42

Green-sickness—“an anaemic disease which mostly affects young women and gives a pale or greenish tinge to the complexion.” It is attended with “morbid appetite”.

She comes in faith, full sail—she is compared to a gaily decorated vessel [cf. Milton's description of Dalila in *Samson Agonistes*].

Streamers—flags. *Shoal*—group. *Tenders*—small boat. *Ha, no*—no, she has not many fools attending her. There is only one—Witwoud. *I cry her mercy*—I thank her (because she is not attended by a shoal of fools). Mirabell corrects himself.

Sculler—a small boat propelled by one man (there was only one fool—Witwoud).

Beau monde—a fashionable crowd of fops. *Perukes*—wigs. It was then a fashion to wear wigs.

Similitudes—comparisons.

Page 43

Palpable hit—smart stroke (of wit).

Tift and tift—tried to arrange my hair, but could not, because the letters were in prose.

Tift—means ‘arranged’.

Page 44

Crips—crisp, curly. [The word is crisp—hence Witwoud’s mocking question].

Take exceptions—take offence.

The object of your power—i.e. your lover, over whom you aim to exercise your power.

Beauty is the lover’s gift—it is because the lover loves a woman that she is beautiful. A lover may see “Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt”. (Shakespeare).

Mortifies—hurts. *Commendation*—praise (of the lover).

Page 45

That reflects our praises—even an ugly woman finds new charms in her face, as she looks into a mirror, after the lover has praised her. Hence the mirror is said to reflect the praise of the lover, not the face of the woman.

The ugly and the old.....face—the beauty of a woman is in the eye of the lover; the lover’s eye is the real mirror which reflects the beauty of a woman. For instance, an ugly and old woman does not feel flattered when she looks into a mirror; but if she has a lover, who praises her beauty, she finds new charms in her face when she looks into the mirror. *Card-matches*—matching of cards like the King and the Queen, in a game of cards.

They—i.e., lover and echo. *They can but reflect...say*—the lover and the echo are produced by our (beautiful) looks and words. *Want a being*—have no being (or existence); they would not exist, if we were “silent or unseen”.

She won’t give an echo fair play—an echo is heard when a

sound stops. But because the lady would not stop talking, the echo produced by her words would not be heard. *Has everlasting rotation of tongues*—talks constantly without stopping.

Page 46

Which is the encumbrance of their lives—which hangs heavy on their hands.

Vapours—depression.

Physic—medicine.

You are not in a course of fools—if, as you say, fools are your medicine, I hope you are not undergoing that course of medicine.

Page 47

I would give something.....help it—of course I cannot help loving you ; it would be better if you did not know it.

As win a woman—Mirabell means that a man cannot win a woman by plainness and sincerity.

Like Solomon—Solomon was a wise king who settled the dispute of two quarrelling women, each of whom claimed to be the mother of a child. Solomon declared that he would cut the child in two, and give one half to each. One of the women agreed : while the other was ready to surrender her claim rather than see the child die. Solomon could see which was the real mother, and delivered the child to her.

If you keep your countenance—i.e., if you keep up that look of gravity.

Page 48

Which of the two—Foible or the devil.

To think of a whirlwind—Millamant is more unsteady and whirling than a whirlwind.

Motion, not method, is their occupation—they are always moving, never stationary.

To be made wise.....instinct—reason tells me that she is unsteady, but I am driven by instinct to love her, and so I ‘play the fool’.

Pair of turtles—pair of turtle-doves ; pair of lovers—Waitwell and Foible.

Valentine's Day—the 14th February, the day on which St. Valentine was beheaded and on which birds were supposed to pair.

Page 50

Spouse—(the word means ‘husband’ or ‘wife’) ; (here) husband. [You have given money to the wife—now the husband waits].

The lease shall be mae good.....stocked—I shall fulfil my promise, and shall reward you handsomely.

Jade—women. *Pert*—impudent.

Preferment—advancement.

Recover my acquaintance.....self—get back to my former self.

Transformation—into Sir Rowland. *Reformation*—back to Waitwell.

Act III

The long act may be divided into *three* parts :—

(i) the clever performance of Foible on the one hand, and the underhand part of Mrs. Marwood on the other ;

(ii) the discomfiture of Mrs. Marwood in her passage with Millamant, and the introduction of Sir Wilful Witwoud ; and

(iii) the plot of Mrs. Marwood and Mr. Fainall.

(i) Lady Wishfort is at her toilet, waiting impatiently for Foible, whom she has sent to Sir Rowland, the pretended uncle of Mirabell. Mrs. Marwood comes to see her and reports that she has seen Foible in conference with Mirabell. The very name of Mirabell sends the old lady to a fit of anger, for she suspects that the cunning fellow (Mirabell) may have “wrought upon Foible to detect” her—“Oh, my dear friend, I 'm a wretch of wretches if I 'm detected.”

Lady Wishfort examines Foible when she returns. Foible concocts a story, which relieves the old lady. Foible further informs her that Sir Rowland is enamoured of her beauty and is soon coming to visit her. This news sets up an agitation in the heart of the old lady, and she goes to her toilet to put herself in proper shape in order to receive her admirer, Sir Rowland.

Mrs. Marwood waiting in a closet overhears a conversation between Foible and Mrs. Fainall, from which she comes to know (*i*) that Mrs. Fainall has been a mistress of Mirabell, and (*ii*) that Mirabell wants to pass off his servant Waitwell as Sir Rowland.

(ii) **A minor intrigue :**

Sir Wilful Witwoud is introduced in this scene. He is a country gentleman and though crude and unlettered, a good-hearted person. Mrs. Marwood proposes to Lady Wishfort that her niece, Millamant, may be married to Sir Wilful. The proposal seems to meet with the approval of the old lady.

Mrs. Marwood is exceedingly jealous of Millamant—and that for two reasons—(*i*) Millamant is more beautiful and attractive than she, and (*ii*) Mirabell loves Millamant and neglects her.

(iii) **The conspiracy of Mrs. Marwood and Fainall :**

Mrs. Marwood discloses to Fainall what she has overheard, and tells him to make the best of the situation. She will send an anonymous letter to Lady Wishfort, exposing the imposture of Waitwell; and Fainall is to threaten her with the exposure of her daughter's unfaithfulness. And then the old lady will be compelled to accept any terms, in order to prevent scandal.

Fainall is furious to hear of his wife's infidelity and determines to take revenge upon her. "If the worst comes to the worst, I will turn my wife to grass."

Page 51

Fretted—worried. *Veracity*—truth. *Arrant*—downright. *Ash*—*i.e.*, pale.

Mopus—you moping girl. *Wench*—girl. *Ratafia*—a kind of liquor.

Spanish paper—toilet article used for improving complexion. *Bobbin*—a small piece of wood in which thread is wound.

Puppet—‘the wooden thing’ upon wires. *Breeding*—pregnant.

Page 52

Maritornes the Asturian—maid-servant in an inn.

Don Quixote—a satirical romance by Cervantes, a Spanish writer. Don Quixote, the hero of this romance, is tended by Maritornes in an inn, when he is wounded.

Deshabille—negligent attire *i.e.*, not properly dressed. *Call my blood*—make me angry.

Wheedling—enticing (by soft words). *What's integrity*—a man remains honest only when there is no opportunity to be dishonest.

Page 53

Quales, Prynne—writers of the 17th century.

Short view of the stage—a pamphlet by Jeremy Collier (1698), in which the immorality of the stage was violently attacked.

The party—*i.e.*, Sir Rowland.

So the devil has been—so Mrs. Marwood has already told Lady Wishfort (that Foible was talking to Mirabell).

Page 54

Gave him his own—paid him back in his own coin.

Ferreting—searching.

Superannuated—old and useless.

Drawer—servant in an inn who draws and serves liquor.

*Locket*s—the name of an inn. *Robin*—the name of the waiter in *Locket*s.

Page 55

Frippery—needless or tawdry adornment in dress.

Old frippery—old woman adorning her person with useless and tawdry finery.

Incontinently—immediately.

Frippery the villian—i.e., reduce him to frippery.

Tatterdemalion—ragged fellow.

Long lane—a lane in London, where old clothes were sold. *Pent house*—slopping roof, as subsidiary structure attached to the wall of a main building. *Gibbet-thief*—one who steals clothes from a hanged criminal. *Railer*—one who uses abusive language. *As much as the million-lottery*—i.e., heavily in debt. *A birth-day*—the celebration of the King's birthday, which involves huge expenditure.

Ludgate—debtors' prison. *Blackfriars*—name of a London theatre.

Mitten—glove. *Angle into Blackfriars*—beg for farthings with an old glove at the door of the Blackfriars.

Economy of face—calmness of countenance.

Fretted—vexed. *Too rashly*—i.e., without considering the consequence to your made-up face.

Varnish—paint.

Page 56

Arrantly flayed—my skin seems to have been completely peeled off.

Keep up to my picture—look like my picture.

Your picture must sit for you—you must be made to look like your picture. [Ordinarily, a man sits for his picture, so that his picture may be like him. Here, the picture of Lady Wishfort will sit for her,—i.e., Lady Wishfort will have to look like her picture.]

Will he not fail—will he not be impressed by me (when he does come) ?

Importunate—pressing.

Decorum—propriety ; the usual practice is that the man should make advances, and not the woman.

Forms—decorums ; proper conduct.

Not amiss—quite proper.

A little scorn becomes your ladyship—you look very attractive when you show a slight scorn.

Swimmingness—soft, tender look. *Be surprised—be taken by surprise.*

Page 57

Brisk—vigorous ; bold.

Correspondence—intimacy.

Winning—attractive. *Has his heart still—is still loved by him.*

A pattern of generosity—though you are still loved by him, you are generous enough to help him in winning Millamant.

Page 58

Laid horrid things to his charge—accused him of serious faults.

Incensed—enraged.

A month's mind—liking (for Mirabell). *Abide—tolerate.*

Mrs. Engine—Foible ; instrument of Mirabell.

Passe-partout—master-key. *So swimmingly*—so successfully.

There was something in it—i. e., Mrs. Fainall had an affair with Mirabell. *It seems it's over with you*—your affair with Mirabell is finished. *Loathing*—hatred.

Appetite—desire. *Surfeit*—excess ; satiety.

Principal—i.e., mistress of Mirabell. *To be an assistant to procure for him*—to act as a procurer, to secure Millamant for him.

Page 59

O man—how foolish is man. *Woman*—how clever is woman.

The devil's an ass—the devil, supposed to be cunning, is a fool. *Driveller*—idiot.

You had not been his confessor—if he had not confessed to you (Foible)—i.e., not confided all his secrets to Foible.

Without—unless. *Chemist....projection*—the alchemist who is eagerly expecting the result of his experiment. [The alchemist in old times used to make experiments to turn lead into gold.]

Olio of affairs—a confused medley of affairs.

Page 60

Mrs. Millamant and he would make a very fit match—Mrs. Marwood throws a hint that Millamant and Sir Wilful may be married, before he starts on his travel.

Provoked me into a flame—made me angry ; thrown me into a fit of anger.

Page 61

Fitt—fought.

Though never so good—however good.

Doily stuff—cheap, coarse stuff.

Would wear alike—i.e., were not to last long.

Fools never wear out—fools remain ever the same.
[Clothes get torn after some time, and are then thrown away ; but fools do not change, and they stick.]

Drap-de-berry—coarse and strong woollen clothes.

Without—unless.

A new masking habit—i.e., a new mask. [When a masquerade is ended, the new mask which has been worn by a dancer is discarded, similarly a fool should be discarded, when one has enough of him.]

To blind her affair—to cover her love-affair.

Appear barefaced and own Mirabell—come out in the open and declare your love for Mirabell. [If you do so, Petulant and Witwoud would not follow you any more.]

The town has found it—every one knows it—it is no more a secret.

The secret is grown too big—however much you try to hide it, the secret of your love is known to all.

'Tis like Mrs. Primly's great belly—just as it is not possible for Mrs. Primley to conceal her pregnancy by means of laces, so it is not possible for you to conceal your love for Mirabell.

Than my Lady Strammel—just as Lady Strammel cannot conceal her fat face with a mask, so you cannot conceal your secret.

Page 62

In defiance of—in spite of.

Rhenish-wine tea—(taken to reduce fat) ; Lady Strammel was growing so fat in spite of taking Rhenish-wine tea that her fat face could not be concealed in a mask.

Comprehended—contained.

A discarded toast—a woman who is no more toasted because she has lost her beauty.

The reason why you discovered it—the reason was that Mirabell neglected Mrs. Marwood who loved him.

Nettled—annoyed.

Complaisance—politeness ; obliging ways.

So particular.....so insensible—so attentive to me and so negligent towards others (*i.e.*, towards Mrs. Marwood).

Despair to prevail—I do not hope to persuade him in this matter ; so he will continue to neglect you, but I cannot help it.

Raillery—ironical wit.

Be so unhappily directed to miscarry—fail to produce any effect on me.

Page 63

I did not mind you—I did not mean you.

Sybil—prophetess. *I am Sybil.....in me*—since I am not a prophetess, I cannot say what Mirabell sees in me to love me.

I 'll take my death—I am sure.

If you could but stay—you are only one or two years older than I. [Then ironically she says that if Mrs. Marwood were to stay where she was, (*i.e.*, not grow older), then Millamant would soon overtake her (*i.e.*, would be as old as she).]

Your merry note may be changed—Mrs. Marwood hints that Mirabell's plot to marry Millamant would not succeed.

The song is in a way addressed to Mrs. Marwood.

Page 64

Inferior beauty—like Mrs. Marwood.

Rival—[Mrs. Marwood].

[What Millamant means by the song is that her joy consists not so much in winning the love of Mirabell as in

vanquishing her rivals, who sought the love of Mirabell but failed to win it. The song is a palpable hit at Mrs. Marwood.]

Animosity composed—quarrel settled.

Treble and bass—Treble is female or boy's voice ; *bass* is deep sounding voice ; man's voice.

Battledore—shuttlecock. *Like Jews*—the Jews were known to be very prolific in producing children.

Page 65

Proof positive—evidence which incontrovertibly establishes a point.

Proof presumption—evidence based on probable circumstances.

Parts—natural gifts.

Be any further from being married, . . . hanged—if he is not fit to be hanged, why should he not be fit to marry ? Just as the chaplain of the prison is paid for setting the psalm at the time of hanging, so the parish priest is paid for ‘reading the ceremony’ at the time of marriage.

Ordinary—priest who attends persons condemned to death.

Page 66

Bartlemew—Saint Bartholomew. A fair was held at Smithfield in London in honour of this saint.

Revolution—the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which placed William and Mary on the throne of England.

Before she is dressed—i.e., before she has painted her face. [The implication is this : the footman has not seen her natural face, he has only seen her painted face ; hence he cannot swear to her face in the morning, i.e., before she has painted it.]

Page 67

Oons—'Swounds ; by God's wounds ; an oath. *Starling*—a kind of small bird.

Smoke—make fun of. [The words of Witwoud are an aside, addressed to Petulant, and are not heard by anybody else].

Smoke the boots—make fun of the boots.

Page 68

Do you speak by way of offence—do you speak to insult me ?

Wrekin—a hill in Shropshire. *Art so becrawated*—are wearing such a big cravat. A cravat is a neckcloth.

Flap-dragon—a play, in which small edibles, as raisins, are snatched from burning brandy and swallowed. *Hare's scut*—hare's tail. *A flap-dragon, a hare's foot, a hare's scut for your service*—i.e., I don't care a fig for your service.

Page 69

Inns of court—four legal societies (Inner Temple, Middle Temple, Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn), having exclusive right of admitting persons to practise at the Bar. *Inns of court breeding*—manners learnt at the Inns of Court, which were then haunts of fashionable people.

Salop—native of Shropshire.

Modish—fashionable.

Lubberly—clumsy. *Slabb er*—drivel ; let the saliva fall down the mouth.

Subpoena—summons demanding a person's attendance in a court of justice.

When you left off Honoured Brother—when you ceased to begin your letter with "Honoured Brother".

Rat me—confound me. *Knight*—Sir Wilful was a

knight. *Tale of a cock and bull*—a made-up story.

Ods heart—God's heart ; an oath.

Before you were out of your time—when you were still attached to an attorney under a contract.

Furnival's Inn—one of the Inns of court. *Attorney*—a lawer.

Gazettes, Dawk's Letter, Weekly Bill—newspapers of former times.

Page 70

Felt maker—felt is a kind of fabric formed of wool and certain kinds of hair.

Ask licence—ask permission. *The weather-cock your companion*—Witwood. *Dainty*—fastidious ; careful.

Page 71

Stand shill I, shall I—vacillate.

Tarry a smaller matter—stay for short while.

Lingo—language (of the fashionable class). *A spice of your French*—slight knowledge of French. *Skipper*—sea-captain ; master of a small trading vessel.

Rallier—satirist ; mocker.

Rally—make fun of.

Railery—good humoured ridicule.

Page 72

Bawd—woman of bad character. *Errant, rank match-making bawd*—a foul, downright bawd and procuress.

All in the Way of the World—this is the Way of our fashionable world.

A cuckold by anticipation—a would be cuckold. *A cuckold in embryo*—a cuckold in the making. *A cuckold* is a husband, whose wife is unfaithful.

Antlers—horns. A cuckold was supposed to have horns in his head.

Satyr—a sylvan deity in Greek mytholygy—with the head of a goat, hence having horns in his head.

A citizen's child—an illegitimate child.

To be outwitted, outjilted, out-matrimonied—to be fooled and betrayed by my wife.

Kept my speed like a stag—ran faster than my wife.

With my horns like a snail—i.e., like a cuckold.

Scurvy—shabby. [If I had outstripped my wife, it would be something. But it is a shameful marriage, in which I am cheated and cuckolded by my wife.]

Shake it off—divorce her.

Page 73

Fond discovery—foolish disclosure of Mirabell's pretended love-making to Lady Wishfort.

Had added lustre to my horn—had brought sufficient money as a compensation for cuckoldom.

Deputy lieutenant's hall—which is decorated by the horns of the deer he has shot.

A cap of maintenance—these horns may prove to you a source of fortune.

Than when you had her—than when you married her, for even then she was carrying on with Mirabell.

Keep—maintain.

Come to any composition—agree to any terms.

Imposture—fraud—viz. of Waitwell impersonating Sir Rowland.

Flag—show any weakness.

Has an appearance—appears to be a good scheme.

Page 74

Disable—disqualify

Set his hand in—engage him in something.

Played the jade—played false.

I am certain—of her unfaithfulness. [Only where there is uncertainty, there is jealousy].

Who has not wherewithal to stake—who has no reputation to lose.

Root—i.e., marriage.

Page 75

Incendiary—one who sets fire to property. Mrs. Marwood calls herself ‘incendiary’ because she will set fire to (i.e., destroy) the plan of Mirabell.

Passages—incidents.

Let the mine be sprung—let the mine explode, i.e., let the imposture be revealed.

Turn my wife to grass—reduce my wife to destitution.

Still believe—always believe that his mistress is faithful to him.

Superstition—false belief.

Herd no more with them—herd no more with ‘husband’; no more mingle with husbands.

Wear the badge—wear the badge of husband; of course I am still a husband.

Disown the order—refuse to call myself a husband. *The order*—the order of husbands.

Or pain or shame—either pain or shame.

Too secure—too confident about their wives’ faithfulness.

Act IV

[The plot, which centres round the marriage of Millamant, advances towards the denouement in this act. (1) Millamant accepts the suit of Mirabell, (2) Sir Wilful Witwoud gets drunk and offends Lady Wishfort, and (3) the anonymous letter (written by Mrs. Marwood) is received by

Lady Wishfort just when Waitwell (representing Sir Rowland) is making his addresses to the old lady.]

Lady Wishfort is making preparation for the reception of Sir Rowland. In the meantime Sir Wilful Witwoud is to make his addresses to Millamant. But he makes a fool of himself when he first meets Millamant.

The central event of the story—the meeting of Mirabell and Millamant—takes place. Millamant consents to marry Mirabell, but before she gives the final word, she lays down in a humorous vein certain conditions which are readily accepted by Mirabell. Similarly Mirabell proposes his own conditions, to which Millamant agrees. This bargaining scene is one of the most brilliant in English comedy, and shows Congreve's inimitable gift of style.

Sir Wilful Witwoud is so heavily drunk that he can hardly speak sense. Lady Wishfort is disgusted by his drunken behaviour and sends him away.

Waitwell, representing Sir Rowland, comes to court Lady Wishfort, who receives him with a fluttering heart. Waitwell is playing the part of a passionate lover, when a shadow falls upon the scene in the shape of an anonymous letter, addressed to Lady Wishfort. The letter tells her of the imposture practised upon her. Waitwell, however, saves the situation temporarily by pretending that the letter has been written by the villain Mirabell.

Page 76

Sconce—flat candle-stick with a handle.

Postillion—one who guides post-horses, or horses in a carriage riding on one of them. .

Pulvilled—sprayed powder on.

With correspondance to—suitable to.

Page 77

Jogging—moving.

Levee—reception of visitors on rising from bed.

Recomposing airs—resuming an attitude of calmness.

Ods my life—an oath.

There never was.....cursed—quotation from a poem written by Suckling (1609–1642), who wrote many love-lyrics.

Page 78

Thyrsis, a youth.....train—from Waller's *Story of Phoebus and Daphne*.

Thyrsis—a shepherd youth in love.

Philosophy—unruffled wisdom.

Confer with—consult.

Page 79

Daunted—afraid.

Vixen trick—trick of a cunning woman. ‘Vixen’ is the feminine of ‘fox’.

I prithee spare me etc.—these and the following lines are from Suckling. *Natural, easy Suckling*—Suckling's poetry is so easy and natural.

Anan—Anon ; I beg your pardon.

Suckling—Sir Wilful does not know of Suckling. He takes ‘Suckling’ in the literal sense—a child that still sucks milk from her mother’s breast.

No such suckling—I am no suckling, nor a stripling.

Stripling—a young lad.

Page 80

Ruder than Gothic—more barbarous and uncouth than the Goths.

Lingo—language ; fashionable language of the court.

To fetch a walk—to take a walk.

Nauseate—hate.

Letourdi—that is not to the point.

'Tis like—it is likely.

Page 81

Spare to speak....speed—don't speak or act hastily.

All a case—all the same.

It will keep cold—it will wait.

Like Phoebus....boy—from Waller's *Story of Phoebus and Daphne*.

Phoebus—Apollo, the sun-god, the god of song.

Daphne—a river-nymph, who was loved by Apollo.

Curious—eager.

At the gate of a monastery—i.e. going to become a nun.

Solicited—courted.

After the last—after the last moment; i.e., even after marriage.

Page 82 -

Draws a moment's air—lives even for a moment.

Bounty—favour. *Impudent*—arrogant.

Saucy—impudent.

Assured man—a man who is sure of winning his lady-love.

Pedantic—assured; confident.

Pragmatical—dogmatic; self-confident. *Air*—look.

After grace—after marriage.

Douceurs—sweet things.

Semmeils du matin—morning sleep.

Page 83

Cant—hypocritical language. *Fulsomely*—disgustingly.

Hyde Park—well-known park in London.

Provoke eyes and whispers—attract the eyes of people and make them whisper.

Interrogatories—questions. *Wry*—distorted.

Wry faces—i.e., expression of annoyance or displeasure.

Page 84

My closet inviolate—my private-chamber not entered into ; my privacy respected.

Subscribed—agreed to.

Bill of fare—list of demands.

Imprimis—in the first place. *Covenant*—demand.

Screen—conceal. *Countenance*—approval.

Decoy-duck—wild duck tamed and trained to tempt and catch others in a trap ; (here) a woman employed to allure others into a snare.

Wheedle—persuade by flattery or soft words. *Wheedle you a fop*—persuade you by flattery to entertain a fop.

Fop—fashionable fellow ; dandy.

Scrambling—going hastily. *Mask*—covering for the face.

Rail at—rebuke ; abuse. *Disappointing*—spoiling.

Frolic—fun.

Which you had—which you had planned. *To pick me up*—in order to pick me up. *Prove my constancy*—prove that I am faithful to you.

Passes current with me—is approved by me.

New coin it—make a new face by the use of paints, powders etc.

Page 85

Vizards—masks.

Hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water—mocking reference to things used by ladies to improve their complexion, or increase their beauty.

Commerce—intercourse.

Atlases—muslin.

Billet—a stick of wood rounded at the top.

Proviso—condition. *Exceed not in your province*—do not go beyond your province—viz. simple tea-table drinks.

Prerogative—exclusive privilege.

Foreign forces—alcoholic drinks.

Page 86

I'll take my death—I am sure.

You have a mind to him—You like him.

In my conscience—I am sure.

Page 87

Ecstasies—passionate raptures.

Fray—quarrel.

Christening—(here) giving of nicknames.

Topsy—intoxicated.

Let out—expanded ; enlarged. *Pieced*—enlarged. His sides would have been enlarged to the point of bursting, by inordinate laughter.

Superannuated lubber—old clumsy fellow.

Unsized camlet—ill-fitting cloak.

Page 88

Sputtering—jabbering ; speaking hastily and indistinctly.

Whine it about—turn round.

Pass on or pass off—yes or no.

Folio—a large-sized book, made by folding a sheet of paper once.

Decimo sexto—a small-sized book, made by folding a sheet of paper sixteen times.

Lacedaemonian—Spartan. Sparta was a city in ancient Greece. The Spartans were laconic in their expression,—*i.e.*, spoke few words.

Epitomiser of words—one who condenses matter, using few words.

Annihilator of sense—one who destroys or distorts the meaning of words.

Retailer—seller of goods in small quantities.

Retailer of phrases—one who relates things in short, pithy phrases.

Remnants of remnants--remainder of remainders--*i.e.*, very small portion.

Pincushion—small cushion for holding pins.

Speaker of shorthand—one who speaks in short phrases, *i.e.*, very briefly.

Without a figure—without speaking metaphorically; literally.

Baldwin—an ass; a character in *Reynard the Fox*, a satirical fable, originally written in French. Partlet the hen is also one of its characters.

Gemini—twins; name of a constellation Castor and Pollux—third sign of Zodiac (Indian name—*mithuna*).

Your twin--Sir Wilful.

Page 89

Castanets—hard wood or ivory instruments used in pairs to keep time in dancing.

I can make less matters conclude premises—even if I have no matter I can pick a quarrel.

Wood louse—a small wingless insect.

Pen me—write for me.

Carry your mistress monkey a spider, go flea dogs—(Slang). You may do whatever you like, I don't care.

In this pickle—in their plight.

Sneaked off—slipped away.

Out upon it--shame. *Comfort yourself*--behave.

Rantipole—wild, reckless person.

At this rantipole rate—in the manner of a wild reckless man.

Borachio—a large leather bottle or bag used in Spain for wine, hence, a drunkard.

Page 90

Put your best foot foremost—show yourself to best advantage.

Bumper—a full glass (of wine). *Has not its fellow*—has not its equal.

Overtaken—overcome (by drink).

Obliged to him—because he has been drinking your health. *In vino veritas*—truth (comes out) in wine. *Piper*—player of music. *Dust it away*—leave it.

Tony—Anthony Witwoud his half brother.

We 'll never have done—we will never finish; we will never have enough.

Page 91

Antipodes—a directly opposite region in the globe.

Topsy-turvy—upside down. Sir Wilful imagines people, standing with head downwards.

Cousin with the hard name—i.e., Millamani. *Counsel*—secret. *At nine-months' end*—when she gives birth to a child.

Tallow-chandler—maker of tallow candles. ‘Tallow’ is a kind of fat, used for making candles.

Saracens—Mahomedans.

Believe not in the grape—do not drink wine.

Stinkard—stinking person; one who emits bad small.

Mufti—Mohammedan priest. *Greek*—unintelligible word.

Page 92

Sultan—Sultan of Turkey.

Sophy—Shah of Persia.

Tumbrill—dung-cart; this dirty drunken fellow.

Bastinadoed—beaten. *An affair of moment*—an important business.

Invades me—demands my attention. *Precipitation*—haste; urgency. *Pox on him*—plague on him.

Shake bag—a fighting cock.

Salopian—a native of Shropshire.

Page 93

Make a match—i.e., Millamant. *Retrospection*—thought.

Pope—the Pope issues indulgences, or pardons, forgiving the sins of sinners.

Jubilee—the year of the installation of a new Pope.

So near an alliance—marriage.

Dispense with—do without.

Transport—excessive joy.

Tantalise—torment with hopes which are always on the point of fulfilment but are never fulfilled. *Rack*—instrument of torture. *Tanalised on the rack*—tormented with the unfulfilled hope of possessing you.

Tenter—machine for stretching cloth. *On the tenter of expectation*—in a state of suspense.

Gallantry—amorous courtliness; politeness and devotion to ladies. *Prevailing vehemence*—force that cannot be resisted.

Nephew—Mirabell. *Inkling*—hint.

Perfidious—teacherous.

Page 94

Pathetic regards—moving looks. *Protesting eyes*—eyes that protested or declared the passion of love.

A' dies—he dies.

Out at knees—in rags, or tattered clothes.

Upward and upward—as if from foot upwards to head.

Stink—noxious smell. *Save-all*—a candle-stand, in which the whole candle can be utilised without any waste.

Labyrinth—maze; intricate ways. *Sinister*—wicked.

Indigestion of widowhood—uncomfortableness of widowhood; unwillingness to remain a widow.

Complacency—yielding attitude.

Lethargy of continence—lack of self-control. *Iteration*—repetition. *Prostitution*—breach.

A person of so much importance—Sir Rowland. [It was only out of her pity for Sir Rowland and to save his life that she has sacrificed her decorum].

Condecension—favour. *Carnality*—sensuality.

Page 95

Camphor and frankincense—(these are burnt as incense in holy places) you are all purity and holiness.

Have found a person . . . honour's cause—have found in me a person who is prepared to suffer agonies for the sake of honour.

Cordial—refreshing drink (to revive my spirit).

Washy—thin, weak, lacking vigour. *To pant*—to lose your spirit.

Antidote (to)—opposite of. *Desire*—sexual desire.

Dog-days—hottest part of the year in July and August.

Page 96

Superscription—address on the top of the letter.

Suborned—bribed.

Imposture—deception.

Page 97

Am I here—it is as sure as I am here.

This pearl of India—Lady Wishfort. *Do I love . . . India*—it is as sure as I love you.

In the same character—in the same style of writing.

Juncture—critical moment. *Was contriving*—was being contrived; was being planned.

His date is short—his life is short : I shall kill him.

Incur the law—make yourself liable to legal prosecution.

Page 98

Conjure you—appeal to you.

ACT V

The denouement of the comedy is reached in this act, but in a most arbitrary manner. The plan which Mirabell had devised to make Lady Wishfort agree to his marriage miscarries ; but the marriage of Mirabell with Millamant *must* take place and Lady Wishfort *must* agree to the marriage in order that the noble and honourable Mirabell may not be deprived of his wife's marriage portion. Hence a curious document is suddenly brought out, and all ends well. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are discomfited ; Mrs. Fainall remains in possession of her estate ; and Mirabell and Millamant marry with Lady Wishfort's glad consent. A question may be asked—why was all the fuss about the elaborate plan of Mirabell to play a trick on Lady Wishfort if it was to produce nothing ? The whole play seems in the beginning to be centred on that intrigue, but it fails as soon as it starts. The elaborately laid plan arouses expectation, which is baffled. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood (who are represented as villains) seem to get the better of Mirabell, but the dramatist helps the hero through his difficulty by suddenly springing upon the audience ‘a deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella Languish, widow to Edward Mirabell.’ Fainall cries, ‘Confusion !’ Indeed, it *is* a confusion. The plot takes an abrupt and unexpected turn, and ends in a pre-conceived denouement in an arbitrary manner.

The Act may be divided into three parts : (1) Lady Wishfort has become furious at the discovery of the trick that has been practised upon her ; (2) Fainall threatens to divorce his wife unless his wife's property is placed in his keeping, and Millamant's inheritance is handed over to him ; and (3) Mirabell saves Lady Wishfort from the clutches of

Fainall and obtains her consent to his marriage with Millamant.

(1) Lady Wishfort is furious at the discovery of the dirty trick that Foible and Waitwell have played upon her. Her abusive words flow in a torrent, and Foible vainly tries to appease her wrath. When Lady Wishfort goes in, threatening to put her in prison, Mrs. Fainall comes and consoles her saying that Mirabell will protect her. Here we are told that Mrs. Fainall is Mirabell's mistress. She herself says, "This is the last day our living together." And her secret affair with Mirabell has been discovered to Lady Wishfort by Mrs. Marwood. Foible discovers another secret to her—viz. that Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's mistress. "Mrs. Marwood and he are nearer related than ever their parents thought for." [Here is a fine state of things : Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's mistress, and Mrs. Fainall is the mistress of Mirabell. Yet there are critics who have nothing but good to say of Mirabell, and who explain away the immorality of this wonderful comedy.]

(2) Mrs. Marwood poses to be a friend of Lady Wishfort and advises her to compound for the frailties of her daughter, so as to avoid the scandal of a' divorce-suit. The conditions imposed by Fainall are : (i) Lady Wishfort shall not re-marry, and shall submit her estate to his management ; (ii) the property of his wife shall be made over to him ; (iii) half of Millamant's inheritance shall be handed over to him. Lady Wishfort writhes under these cruel conditions, but she has no way out. The detection of Mrs. Marwood's affair with Fainall does not help her out of her difficulty.

(3) A surprise waits for Lady Wishfort as well as for the audience. Millamant has agreed to marry Sir Wilful

Witwoud, and as Lady Wishfort assents to this marriage, Millamant will not lose her inheritance. One of Fainall's demands is thus brushed aside. Another demand of Fainall is that his wife's estate shall be handed over to him. But a document is produced by Mirabell to show that she has already given her estate to the keeping of Mirabell. Thus fails the conspiracy of Fainall the villain.

But what about Mirabell, the 'gentleman', who has seduced Mrs. Fainall? He is rewarded with the hand of the beautiful Millamant. And to achieve this end, Sir Wilful plays an obliging part. He has only engaged as a volunteer in this affair in order to help "the gentleman" and "the fine lady". As soon as the storm blows over, he declares his intention to "prosecute his travel". He says to Lady Wishfort :

" 'Sheart, aunt, I have no mind to marry. My cousin 's a fine lady, and the gentleman loves her, and she loves him, and they deserve one another. My resolution is to see foreign parts—I have set on it, and when I am set on 't, I must do 't.' "

Lady Wishfort is grateful to Mirabell for having saved her from the clutches of Fainall, and gladly gives her consent to his marriage with Millamant.

"Well, Sir, take her, and with her all joy I can give you." And Millamant, a 'worthy lady', gladly gives herself to Mirabell, the 'gentleman' who has been living together with Mrs. Fainall till that day. Somehow a bitter taste is left in the mouth in the end, in spite of all the brilliancy and wit of Congreve.

Page 99

Washing of old gauze etc.—Foible had been a poor starving maid, keeping a mean shop, when Lady Wishfort engaged her as her 'woman'. *Weaving of dead hair*—making wigs out of the hair of dead persons. *Blue nose*—on account

of cold. *Chafing dish*—vessel with burning charcoal inside. *Starved embers*—charcoal that has burnt out. *Traverse*—hung across the shop. *Rag*—torn curtain.

Drive a trade—carry on some trade.

Flaunting—displaying. *Pack thread*—coarse thread for sewing up packages. *Bulk*—stall or framework built in a shop.

Frisoneer-gorget—handkerchief made of coarse stuff.

Colberteen—cheap lace. *Gnawed*—worn away.

Trull—whore; low sluttish woman.

Governante—governess.

Feathered your nest—made sufficient money in my service.

Seduced—coaxed me with his sweet tongue.

Page 100

Deluded—deceived. *Indies*—she means, India.

Cast-serving man—rejected servant. *Pimp*—pander.

Frontless impudence—shameless, impudent woman.

Big-bellied—pregnant.

Void—invalid. *Secure*—protect.

Put upon his clergy—plead for the benefit of the clergy i.e. exemption of criminal process in view of his first offence. [Benefit of clergy was granted for first offence of persons who could read.]

Meddle or make—interfere or proceed in the water.

Property—“a mere tool, or cat’s paw.”

Abigails and Andrews—maid-servants and servants. (‘Abigail’ stands for a waiting maid, and ‘Andrew’ for a waiting-man.)

A botcher of second-hand marriages—a maker of marriages, arranged with an ulterior motive.

Baste—stitch together; tack. *Couple you*—join you together (in prison).

Philander—lover.

Duke's place you—put you in Duke's place (Aldgate); put you in prison.

Your turtle—your lover. (Turtle is a kind of dove). *Coo in the same cage*—remain in the same prison.

Warrant—i.e. warrant of arrest.

Page 101

Bridewell—women's prison. *Had to justice*—placed on trial before a judge.

To beat hemp—'beating hemp' was one of the hard works imposed upon the prisoners.

Missing effect—proving unfruitful.

Confederacy—conspiracy.

Stifled—suppressed.

He has been even with your ladyship—he and you are quits: he has been carrying on with Mrs. Marwood, as you have been carrying on with Mirabell.

Page 102

Nearer related—their relations are more intimate (Fainall being the lover of Mrs. Marwood).

In a perilous passion—very angry.

At something Mr. Fainall has said—Mrs. Fainall has said that Mrs. Fainall is a mistress of Mirabell.

Hurricane—storm; stormy scene.

My lady is resolved—i.e., Millamant would marry Sir Wilful rather than lose six thousand pounds.

Page 103

Vouch—affirm.

Imposter—cheat. *Are become an intercessor*—mediate.

Compound—settle by payment of money. *Frailties*—weaknesses.

Purling—murmuring.

Concerned in the treaty—interested in the settlement of this affair. *Iniquity*—wickedness ; immorality.

Lean aside to iniquity—become immoral.

Page 104

Naught—wicked *i.e.* unfaithful to your husband.

Sophisticated—(here) corrupt. *Caprices*—whims.

Cuckoldom—playing false to your husband.

Your friend's friend—*i.e.* Mrs. Marwood's lover.

Passionate—angry.

Temper—mental balance, or composure, especially under provocation of any kind. (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary.*)

More temper innocence—if you were innocent, you would not lose your mental balance ; the very fact that you get excited shows that you are not innocent.

I have done—I have finished.

Affronts—insults.

My good genius—my good angel (addressed to Mrs. Marwood).

Page 105

Abused—deceived. *Drop off when she is full*—leave you only when she has got your money (just as a leech drops off when it has sucked enough blood).

In composition for me—by way of settlement for my supposed guilt.

Unexceptionable—perfect ; blameless.

Rudiments—elementary principles. *Odium*—hatred.

Till she was in her teens—till she was thirteen or fourteen. *Teens*—from thirteenth to nineteenth year.

Babes—dolls.

Made a shift—contrived (to pass off the chaplain as a woman, because of his long coat and smooth face). *Sleek*—smooth ; devoid of hair.

Catechise—instruct by questions and answers.

Filthy—immoral. *Profane*—wicked. *Lewd*—wicked.

Treble—soprano : highest female or boy's voice.

Squeak—scream out. *Bawdy*—obscene matter.

Basses—deep sounding voice—lowest part in music.

Blasphemy—irreligious or impious matter.

Can be naught—can be immoral. *Whore*—a loose, immoral woman.

And thought it an excommunication—and (she would have) thought it an irreligious act bringing upon her the curse of excommunication from the Church.

Excommunication—cutting off or expelling a person from the Church.

Page 106

Prostituted—disgraced. *Worried*—attacked and torn to pieces. *Bawling*—shouting. *To be ushered in with an O yes of scandal*—(your name) to be mentioned by scalmongers with gratified relish.

Fumbling—handling things awkwardly.

Lecher—licentious lawyer.

Quaif—white cap of a lawyer.

Bring to light—expose.

Legal punsters—quibbling lawyers. *Rule of court*—ruling of the court. *Precedent*—previous example.

Doomsday Book—record of grants of lands and properties of England (made by William the Conqueror in 1086).

Discompose—ruffle ; disturb. *The bench*—the judges.

Interrogatories—questions. *Law Latin*—legal terms in Latin language. *Tickled*—amused.

Simpers—smiles affectedly. *Fidgets*—moves restlessly.

Cantharides—bright green insects dried and used for raising blisters ; blister-fly.

Cow-itch—a stinging plant.

Young revellers of the Temple—young law students of the Inns of Court ; they will take notes to the divorce case in the

same way as apprentice-clergyman does of the sermons at a conventicle. *Conventicle*—religious meeting.

Commons—common table, where meals are shared in common. *Drawer*—one who serves liquor.

Flounder man—one who stumbles in speaking.

Page 107

Composition—settlement.

Overseen—overlooked. *Huddle up*—Hush up.

Condole with—sympathise.

Supposed—allowed. *Importunity*—entreaty.

Perfidiousness—treachery.

As of health—suppose I am advised to marry on grounds of health.

If you are prescribed marriage—if you are advised to marry by a doctor in the interest of your health.

Physic—medicine; i.e. marriage.

Page 108

Apothecary—doctor.

Muscovite—(adj. from Moscow) Russian; A Russian husband was supposed in those days to be cruel.

His Czarish Majesty—Peter the Great of Russia visited England in 1697, three years before the production of this play.

Northen hemisphere—Russia. *Moiety*—half.

Non compos—not master of himself (because he was overcome by drink.)

The instrument is drawing—the deed is being prepared.

Set your hand—put your signature.

Balance—consider (the pros and cons of the matter).

Page 109

Smart—suffer. **Wantonness**—looseness of morals.

Her year was not out—the year of mourning (for her husband's death) was not yet over.

Matched with a witness—equally matched indeed; she has found a fine husband indeed.

With a witness—“without a doubt and no mistake” (obs. or are)—Shorter Oxford Dictionary.

Rebel rate—cruel and unjust manner.

Two more of my Egyptian plagues—two more of my troubles. *Egyptian plagues* refer to the ten plagues that visited Egypt when the Pharaoh (King of Egypt) refused permission to the Israelites under Moses to leave Egypt.

Caterpillar—immature butterfly; (here used contemptuously) despicable fellow.

In disguise—i.e. I was not my real self—as I was under the influence of liquor.

Content—satisfy you. *Make no more words*—do not say anything.

To be a sacrifice to your repose—sacrifice myself to give you peace of mind.

This flower of knighthood—Sir Wilful.

Page 110

Make a resignation of it—renounce it; cancel it.

Without—outside.

Something—somewhat. *That traitor*—Mirabell.

Fortify—strengthen. *Support*—bear.

Gorgon—in Greek mythology, the Gorgons were three sisters—snake-haired women, whose looks turned any beholder to stone.

Petrify—turn into stone. *Incessantly*—Lady Wishfort's mistake for ‘immediately’.

Disoblige—show discourtesy to him.

Pylades and Orestes—two proverbial friends in classical mythology.

Overseas—across the seas. *Proviso*—condition.

Precious—fine. *If it would pass*—if it would succeed.

I'll know the bottom of it—I shall find out the real truth of it.

'Sbud—by God's blood ; an oath by the blood of Christ.

An—if. *Harkee*—hark you ; listen.

Page 111

Her face is none of her own—because it is painted.

Mum—silence (don't speak of it).

Contrition—repentance. *Suppliant*—suppliant ; one who begs.

Prejudice—injury.

A face of guiltiness—an appearance of guiltiness.

Artifice—trick. *Venial*—pardonable. *Errors which love produces etc.*—I resorted to that trick only out of my love for Millamant, and a trick produced by love is always pardoned.

I hold most dear—i.e. Millamant.

An—if. *Quorum*—originally, certain justices of the peace usually of special qualifications, whose presence was necessary to constitute a bench ; later applied loosely to all justices ; (here) justices of the peace.

I may never be of the quorum—I may never be a Justice of the Peace. [Mirabell's pleading is so moving that if he is not moved by it he should not be a Justice of the Peace.]

Page 112

Take shipping—go across the seas. *Melt*—dissolve (See next sentence).

Mouth glue—(lit. “glue to be used by moistening with the tongue”) ; word of mouth.

Doleful—sorrowful. *It is dissolved*—i.e. mouth glue will be dissolved—i.e. the word of mouth will be inoperative.

Insinuating—ingratiating ; wheedling ; artful.
Stifle—suppress.
Concern—importance. *Transcendent*—extraordinary.
Rakes the embers—awakens my old passion.
Smothered—suppressed.
Date of deliberation—time for thinking. *Instrument*—legal document.
Sham—trick ; hoar. *Gross*—obvious.
'Tis imposed on you—it has deceived you.
Pretension—claim (on Millamant).
Old fox—(colloquial) faithful sword.
Ram vellum—sheepskin.

Page 113

Parchment—the deed was in parchment.
Mittimus—warrant committing a person to prison.
Respite—restrain.
Provided of your guard—protected.
Your single beef-eater—(sarcastic) reference to Sir Wilful's bulky body. *As pursuant to*—according to.
Covenant—contract. *Make a bear garden flourish*—shout and fight. *Subscribed*—signed.
A leaky bulk—a leaking ship.
Subsistence—support.
My reward—i.e. the hand of Millamant.
My reward is intercepted—I cannot get my reward—for Millamant is to be married to Sir Wilful.

Page 114

Penitent—repentant.
The Way of the World—usual thing in the fashionable world. *Abate*—diminish. *One title*—even the smallest part. *To give credit to*—to trust.
Aspersions—false accusations. *Mercenary trulls*—loose women, who are hired.

Page 115

Messalina's poems--Foible's error for 'Miscellaneous Poems' ; a book of poems,

Held our tongues--kept quiet.

Expedient--device. *Smart*--suffer. *Wherewithal*--means (by which you can hide your shame).

Aspersed--accused.

Your treacherous--your treacherous (mistress)--she does not utter the word 'mistress'.

Not while..groat--(I shall not starve) as long as you are worth something :--as long as you have money, I shall squeeze you.

O Sir Rowland--that fellow, who personated Sir Rowland !

Page 116

Whose hand's out--who is losing ?

Set his mark--put his thumb mark, suggesting that he could not sign.

Your lady--your wife. *While she was at her own disposal*--while she was free, and was not married to you.

Pretended--false.

Cautions--warnings. *Tyranny of temper*--bad temper.

Page 117

Elder date--prior date.

Perfidious--treacherous.

Oaf--idiot.

To whose advice all is owing--all this is due to his good advice.

To break the matter--to tell him that Millamant is not to marry him.

Engaged a volunteer--engaged as a volunteer ; volunteered his service in this affair.

Page 118

Set on it--made up mind to do it.

Best off or not--done or not done.

In a maze--bewildered.

Toy--play ; make love.

Hold out--endure. *Pursue some desperate course*--do something desperate.

Page 119

Disquiet--trouble.

This deed of trust--this trust-deed ; this document.

Mutual falsehood--faithlessness on the part of husband or wife.

Each deceiver--i.e. both husband and wife, who deceive.

That 'marriage frauds...kind--if the husband or the wife proves unfaithful, he or she will be paid in the same coin : i.e., if a husband is faithless, his wife will also be faithless to him, and vice versa. [This is the moral of the play.]

Epilogue

Epilogue--speech at the end of a play.

Dismisses--disperses.

Pulled to pieces--dissected and criticised.

Doom its fall--condemn it.

Spleen--ill humour.

In shoals--in groups. *Pit*--pit of the theatre.

On no pretence--on no account. *On judgment fit*--fit to pass judgment on a play. *Damned*--condemned.

With scurrilous intent--with the object of abusing people.

To know the copied face--to know the persons, for whom the characters in the play stand.

Glosses--commentary. *Feed their own ill nature*--gratify their own spleen.

Libel--slander. *Satire*--ludicrous presentation of weaknesses.

To think themselves--i.e., to think that they themselves are represented as fools in the play.

Furnish fool—furnish folly.

To entertain--to entertain the audience.

Any one abstracted fop—one selected fool, one single fool.

For when painters form . . . coquettes and beaux—just as painters, when they paint a beautiful face, portray an ideal face, giving to it various elements of beauty, found in different individuals, so poets, when they represent fools, combine in their portraits, different characteristics of folly found in different fools.

EXTRACTS FROM EMINENT CRITICS

(1)

Jeremy Collier :

To sum up the evidence. A fine gentleman is a fine whoring, swearing, smutty, atheistical man. These qualifications, it seems, complete the idea of honour. They are the top-improvements of fortune, and the distinguishing glories of birth and breeding ! This is the stage-test for quality, and those that can't stand it ought to be disclaimed. The restraints of conscience and the pedantry of virtue are unbecoming a cavalier. Here you have a man of breeding and figure that burlesques the Bible, swears, and talks smut to ladies, speaks ill of his friend behind his back, and betrays his interest : a fine gentleman that has neither honesty nor honour, conscience nor manners, good nature nor civil hypocrisy : fine only in the insignificancy of life, the abuse of religion, and the scandals of conversion. These worshipful things are the poets' favourites : they appear at the head of fashion, and shine in character and equipage.... And what can be the meaning of this wretched distribution of honour ? It is not to give credit and countenance to vice, and shame young people out of all pretences to conscience and regularity ? They seem forced to turn lewd in their own defence : they can't otherwise justify themselves in the fashion, nor keep up the character of gentlemen....The fine ladies are of the same cut with the gentlemen.

Thus we see what a fine time lewd people have on the English stage. No censure, no mark of infamy, no fortification must touch them. They keep their honour untarnished,

and carry off the advantage of their character. They are set up for the standard of behaviour, and the masters of ceremony and sense. And at last, that the example may work the better, they generally make them rich and happy, and reward them with their own desires.

[From *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.*]

(2)

Charles Lamb on Restoration Comedy :

I confess for myself that (with no great delinquencies to answer for) I am glad for a season to take an airing beyond the diocese of the strict conscience, not to live always in the precincts of the law-courts, but now and then, for a dream-while or so, to imagine a world with no meddling restrictions to get into recesses, whither the hunter cannot follow me—

Secret shades
Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
While yet there was no fear of Jove—

I come back to my cage and my restraint the fresher and more healthy for it. I wear my shackles more contentedly for having respired the breath of an imaginary freedom. I do not know how it is with others, but I feel the better always for the perusal of one of Congreve's—nay, why should I not add even of Wycherley's—comedies, I am the gayer at least for it; and I could never connect those sports of a witty fancy in any shape with any result to be drawn from them to imitation in real life. They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairy-land. They have got out of Christendom into the land—what shall I call it?—of cuckoldry—the Utopia of gallantry, when plea-

sure is a duty, and the manners perfect freedom. It is altogether a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is. No good person can be justly offended as a spectator, because no good person suffers on the stage. Judged morally, every character in these plays—the few exceptions only are mistakes—is alike essentially vain and worthless. The great art of Congreve is shown specially in this, that he has entirely excluded from his scene—some little generosities in the part of Angelica excepted—not only anything like a faultless character, but any pretensions to goodness or good feelings whatsoever. Whether he did this designedly or instinctively the effect is as happy as the design (if design) is bold. I used to wonder at the strange power which his *Way of the World* in particular possesses of interesting you all along in the pursuit of characters, for whom you absolutely care nothing, for you neither hate nor love his personages—and I think it is owing to this very indifference for any, that you endure the whole. He has spread a privation of moral light, I will call it, rather than by the ugly name of palpable darkness, over his creations, and his shadows flit before you without distinction or preference.

Translated into real life, characters of his and his friend Wycherley's dramas, are profligates, and strumpets, the business of their brief existence, the undivided pursuit of lawless gallantry. No other spring of action, or possible motive of conduct is recognized ; principles which, universally acted upon, must reduce this frame of things to a chaos. But we do them wrong in so translating them. No such effects are produced in *their* world. When we are among them, we are amongst a chaotic people. We are not to judge them by

our usages. No reverend institutions are insulted by their proceedings,—for they have, none among them. No peace of families is violated,—for no family ties exist among them. No purity of the marriage bed is stained, for none is supposed to have a being. No deep affections are disquieted,—no holy wedlock bonds are snapped asunder,—for affection's depth and wedded faith are not of the growth of that soil. There is neither right nor wrong,—gratitude or its opposite,—claim or duty,—paternity or sonship.

The whole is a passing pageant, where we would sit as unconcerned at the issues, for life or death, as at a battle of frogs and mice. But, like Don Quixote, we take part against the puppets and quite as impertinently. We dare not contemplate an Atlantis, a scheme, out of which our coxcombical moral sense is for a little transitory ease excluded. We have not the courage to imagine a state of things for which there is neither reward nor punishment. We cling to the painful necessities of shame and blame. We would indict our very dreams !

[From "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century"
in *The Essays of Elia*]

(3)

William Hazlitt :

Comedy is a "graceful ornament to the civil order, the Corinthian capital of polished society"....To read a good comedy is to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said, and the most amusing happen. The wittiest remarks are always ready on the tongue, and the luckiest occasions are always at hand to give birth to the happiest conceptions. Sense makes strange havoc of nonsense. Refinement acts as a foil to affectation, and affecta-

tion to ignorance. Sentence after sentence tells. In turning over the pages of the best comedies we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour....

The four principal writers of this style of comedy are undoubtedly Wycherly, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar. The dawn was in Etherage, as its latest close was in Sheridan.

Congreve is the most distinct from the others, and the most easily defined, both from what he possessed and from what he wanted. He had by far the most wit and elegance, with less of other things, of humour, character and incident.

His style is inimitable, nay perfect. It is the highest model of comic dialogue. Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceit, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dullness. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up. This style, which he was almost the first to introduce, and which he carried to the utmost pitch of classical refinement, reminds one exactly of Collins's description of wit as opposed to humour.

'Whose jewels in his crisped hair
Are placed each other's light to share.'

Sheridan will not bear a comparison with him in the regular antithetical construction of his sentences, and in the mechanical artifices of his style.... It bears every mark of being what he himself in the dedication of one of his plays tells us that it was a spirited copy taken off and carefully revised from the most select society of his time, exhibiting all the sprightliness, ease, and animation of familiar conversation, with the

correctness and delicacy of the most finished composition. His works are a singular treat to those who have cultivated a taste for the niceties of English style : there is a peculiar flavour in the very words, which is to be found in hardly any other writer.

The Way of the Wor'd was the author's last and most carefully finished performance. It is an essence almost too fine ; and the sense of pleasure evaporated in an aspiration after something that seems too exquisite ever to have been realized. After inhaling the spirit of Congreve's wit, and tasting "love's thrice reputed nectar" in his works, the head grows giddy in turning from the highest point of rapture to the ordinary business of life ; and we can with difficulty recall the truant Fancy to those objects which we are fain to take up with here, for better, for worse.- Millamant is the perfect model of the accomplished fine lady. She is the ideal heroine of the comedy of high life, who arrives at the height of indifference to everything from the height of satisfaction ; to whom pleasure is as familiar as the air she draws, elegance worn as a part of her dress, wit the habitual language which she hears and speaks ; love a matter of course, and who has nothing to hope or fear, her own caprice being the only law to herself, and rule to those about her.... There is a callousness in the worst characters in *The Way of the World*, in Fainall and his wife, and Mrs. Marwood, not very pleasant, and grossness in the absurd ones, such as Lady Wishfort and Sir Wilful, which is not a little amusing....The description of Lady Wishfort's face is a perfect piece of painting. The force of style in this author at times amounts to poetry.

[From *Lectures on the English Comic Writers.*]

(4)

Macaulay :

During the forty years which followed the Restoration, the whole body of the dramatists invariably represent adultery, we do not say as a peccadillo, we do not say as an error which the violence of passion may excuse, but as the calling of a fine gentleman, as a grace without which character would be imperfect. It is essential to his breeding and to his place in society that he should make love to the wives of his neighbours as that he should know French, or that he should have a sword by his side....

In the name of art, as well as in the name of virtue, we protest against the principle that the world of pure comedy is one into which no moral enters. If comedy be an imitation under whatever conventions, of real life, how is it possible that it can have no reference to the great rule that directs life ? If what Mr. Charles Lamb says were correct, the inference would be that these dramatists did not in the least understand the very first principles to their craft. Pure landscape-painting into which no light or shade enters, pure portrait-painting into which no expression enters, are phases less at variance with sound criticism than pure comedy into which no moral enters.

But it is not the fact that the world of these dramatists is a world into which no moral enters. Morality constantly enters into that world, a sound morality, and an unsound morality, the sound morality to be insulted, derided, associated with everything mean and hateful, the unsound morality to be set off to every advantage, and inculcated by all methods, direct and indirect.... The morality of the Country Wife and Old Bachelor is the morality, not as Mr. Charles

Lamb maintains of an unreal world, but of a world which is a great deal too real. It is the morality, not of a chaotic people, but of low townrakes. And the question is simply this, whether a man of genius who constantly and systematically endeavours to make this sort of character attractive, by uniting it with beauty, grace, dignity, spirit, a high social position, popularity, literature, wit, taste, knowledge of the world, brilliant success in every undertaking, does not make an ill use of his powers. We own that we are unable to understand how this question can be answered in any way but one.

[From *Critical and Historical Essays*, Vol. II]

(5)

Thackeray :

Congreve's comic feast flares with lights, and round the table, emptying their flaming bowls of drink, and exchanging the wildest jests and ribaldry, sit men and women, waited on by rascally valets and attendants as dissolute as their mistresses—perhaps the very worst company in the world. There doesn't seem to be a pretence of morals. At the head of the table sits Mirabell or Belmour (dressed in the French fashion and waited on by English imitators of Scapin and Fontin). Their calling is to be irresistible and to conquer everywhere like the heroes of the chivalry story, whose long-winded loves and combats they were sending out of fashion ; they are always splendid and triumphant—overcome all dangers, vanquish all enemies, and win the beauty at the end. Fathers, husbands, usurers, are the foes these champions contend with. They are merciless on old age invariably, and an old man plays the part in these dramas which the wicked enchanter or the great blundering giant performs in

the chivalry tales, who threatens and grumbles and resists—a huge stupid obstacle always overcome by the knight. It is an old man with a money-box, Sir Belmour ; his son or nephew spends his money and laughs at him. It is an old man with a young wife whom he locks up : Sir Mirabell robs him of his wife, trips up his gouty old heels and leaves the old hunks. The old fool, what business has he to hoard his money, or to lock up blushing eighteen ? Money is for youth, love is for youth, away with the old people. When Millamant is sixty, having of course divorced the first Lady Millamant, and married his friend Doricourt's grand-daughter out of the nursery—it will be his turn ; and young Belmour will make a fool of him. All this pretty morality you have in the comedies of William Congreve, Esq. They are full of wit. Such manners as he observes, he observes with great humour ; but ah ! it 's a weary feast, that banquet of wit where no love is. It palls very soon ; and indigestions follow it and lonely blank headaches in the morning.

[From *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century.*]

(6)

Meredith :

Congreve's *Way of the World* is an exception to our other comedies, his own among them, by virtue of the remarkable brilliancy of the writing, and the figure of Millamant...His *Way of the World* may be called The Conquest of a Town Coquette, and Millamant is a perfect portrait of a coquette, both in her resistance to Mirabell and the manner of her surrender, and also in her tongue....Contrast the wit of Congreve's with Moliere's. That of the first is a Toledo blade, sharp, and wonderfully supple for steel ; cast for duelling, restless in the scabbard, being so pretty when out of it. To shine ; it must have an adversary. Moliere's

wit is like a running brook, with innumerable fresh lights on it at every turn of the wood through which its business is to find a way.

Where Congreve excels all his English rivals is in his literary force, and a succinctness of style peculiar to him. He had correct judgment, a correct ear, readiness of illustration within a narrow range, in snapshots of the obvious and copious language. He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialogue. He is at once precise and voluble. If you have ever thought upon style you will acknowledge it to be a signal accomplishment. In this he is a classic, and is worthy of treading a measure with Moliere. *The Way of the World* may be read out currently at a first glance, so sure are the accents of the emphatic meaning to strike the eye, perforce, of the crispness and cunning polish of the sentences.... The flow of boudoir Billingsgate in Lady Wishfort is unmatched for the vigour and pointedness of the tongue. It spins along with a final ring, like the voice of Nature in a fury, and is, indeed, racy eloquence of the elevated fishwife.

Millamant is an admirable, almost a loveable heroine. It is a piece of genius in a writer to make a woman's manner of speech portray her. You feel sensible of her presence in every line of her speaking.

[From *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*]

(7)

That the Congrevian comedy was immoral, no one can deny, unless by a species of sophism not unknown to modern critics, but the Jonsonian comedy was just as licentious, with the quality of brutality added thereto. The pro-

blem, of course, has been deeply complicated by exaggerated pronouncements, on the one hand, of the Puritans who see all art through the dark spectacles of their own morality, and, on the other, both of moral perverts who take delight in pornographic literature of any sort, and of fanciful enthusiasts like Lamb who weave airy fancies out of their own imaginations. A true judgment can be gained only by a strictly impartial critic....

The first point to notice, it seems to me, is that in the hands of Etherege and of Congreve, comedy is wholly intellectual and passionless. There is no "warmth" in their works, as a Restoration critic might have said...If there are vulgar scenes or sensual jokes they are dragged in not for the sake of the vulgarity or of the sensuality, but because they are witty and amusing....The second point to be noticed is not unconnected with the first. The life reflected in the comedies of Etherege and of Congreve is not the whole of life : it is rather the essence of the upper-class existence of the time. The world presented before us, then, is certainly not artificial in Lamb's sense, it is only too real : but it is not realistic to the extent of dragging in forcibly the cruder aspects of life.

[From *A History of Restoration Drama*]

(8)

Edmund Gosse :

The main quality of Congreve, and that by which he still holds a place among the great writers of the century, is his wit ; in this he is unapproached in modern drama, even in France, where Moliere, who excels him in the other branches of dramatic ability, is for once inferior to Congreveit has to be added that he neglected other necessary parts of the dramatic scheme in the cultivation of wit. His action is left to wait, cap in hand, on the leisure of his

dialogue, and when the former is resumed, the poet has often the air of forgetting whither he intended to proceed with it. His plots are difficult to recollect, and not always very natural in their development. His characters are clearly defined, and often very original : but his conception of them is cynical to a degree which excuses the disfavour into which his comedies have fallen.....The drama of Congreve combined, to a singular degree, the very finest literary art with the extreme of what is debased in morals and superficial in sentiment.

[From *A History of Eighteenth Century Literature*]

(9)

F. E. Schelling :

The comedies of Congreve are of a literary excellence that overtops not only the comedies of their own age but that quality in all his imitators. There is no parallel in English to the directness, incisiveness, brilliancy and ease of his stage dialogue. And his personages, however they belong to the accepted categories of fops, gallants and ladies of fashion and intrigue, are conceived and executed with an air and distinction that raises them as much above their fellows of Etherege, Wycherley or Vanbrugh as Congreve himself excelled in the company he so loved.....Judged by any standards applicable to actual life this entire Restoration comedy is hopelessly immoral and corrupt. Whether we are able to achieve the detachment that may enable us to accept it for its artistic and literary qualities (so far as it really possesses them), or anathematise it unconditionally with honest Jeremy Collier, must depend less on our morals than on our attitude of mind.

From *The English Drama*.

QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the Comedy of Manners.
2. Examine *The Way of the World* as a comedy of manners.
3. Write a note on the title of the play.
4. "Plot counts hardly at all ; manners are the principal theme." Discuss the criticism of *The Way of the World*.
5. Do you agree with Lamb's contention that the 'comedy of manners is artificial' and is therefore not concerned with the question of morality ? Give reasons for your answer.
6. "The comedy of manners is heartless." Discuss with reference to *The Way of the World*.
7. Write a note on the plot construction of *The Way of the World*.
8. Would you consider *The Way of the World* a great comedy ? Give reasons for your answer.
9. Write a note on Congreve's wit, with adequate illustrations from *The Way of the World*.
10. Discuss the comic spirit in *The Way of the World*.
11. Give your impression of Millamant. Do you consider Mirabell a fitting husband for her ?
12. What are the elements of excellence in the comedy of *The Way of the World*.
13. Examine the nature of the comedy in *The Way of the World*.
14. Was Collier justified in condemning the comedy of manners on the score of immorality ?
15. Write a brief criticism of *The Way of the World* as a comedy.

The End

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11. H. T. E. Perry : *The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama*.
12. B. Dobre : *The Restoration Comedy*.

